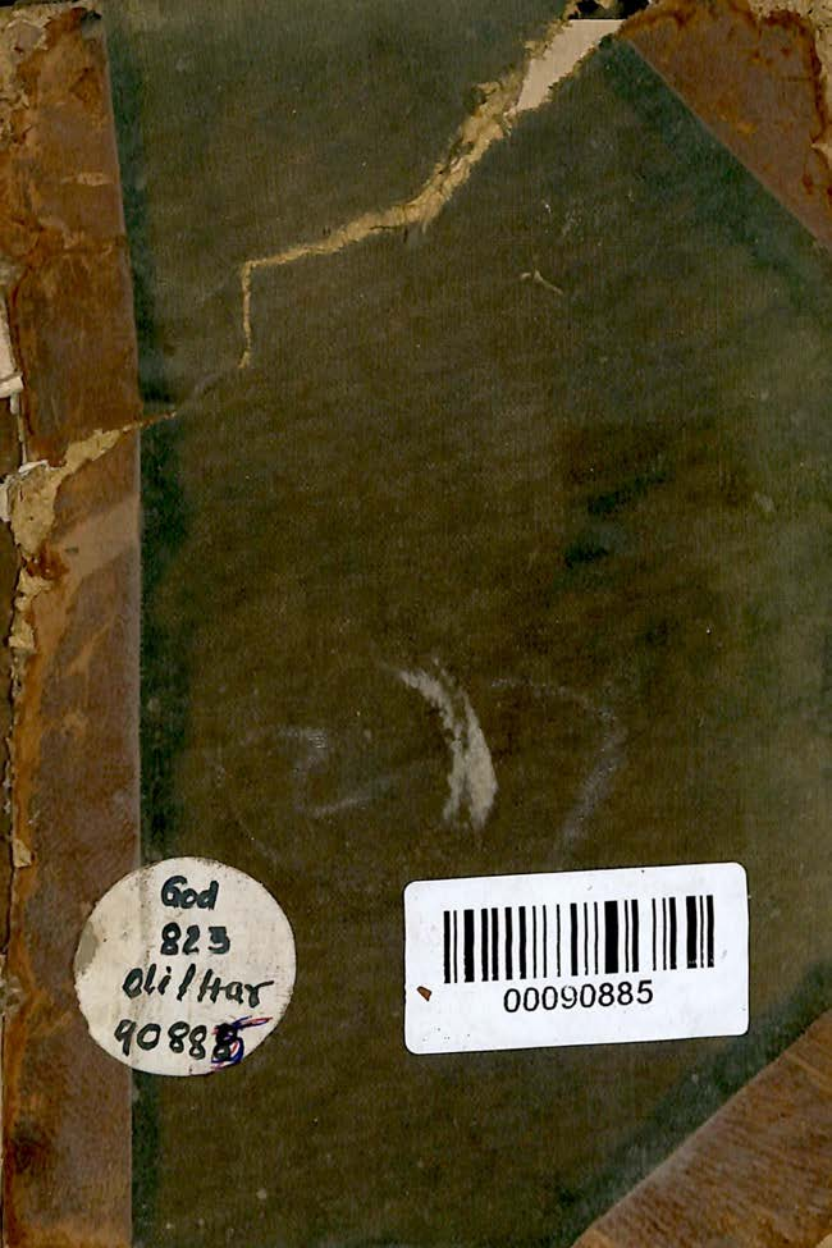
God
823
Oli/Har
90885
00090885

BOMBAY BRANCH

OF THE

Royal Asiatic Society.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 05 October, 2018

HARRY JOSCELYN.

VOL. II.

HARRY JOSCELYN.

c0885
a1

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF

"The Chronicles of Carlingford,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1881.

All rights reserved.

God
823
Oli/Hav
90885

00090885

HARRY JOSCELYN.

CHAPTER I.

HARRY'S RESOLUTION.

THERE is nothing that grows and strengthens with thinking of it like the sense of personal injury. Harry Joscelyn had been very angry when he left home; but he was not half so angry at that moment as when he looked out of the window of the railway carriage, as the train swept through the valley, and saw in the distance the village roofs, over which, had there been light enough, and had his eyes served him so far, he might have seen the White House seated, firm and defiant, upon the Fellside. And every mile that he travelled his wrath and indignation grew. When he reached Liverpool he had formed his purpose beyond the reach of

argument, or anything that reason could say; and reason said very little in the general excitement of his being. He had been turned out of his home, he had been refused the money by which he thought he could have made his fortune. He felt himself cast off by everybody belonging to him. His mother had permitted that final outrage, he thought; for surely she could have found means of help if she had chosen to exert herself. His Uncle Henry had bought himself off, and got rid of a troublesome applicant by the gift of that twenty pounds. They were all against him. He thought of it and thought of it till they seemed to be all his enemies, and at last he came to believe that they were glad to get quit of him, to be done with him. This was the aspect under which he contemplated his relations with his family when he got to Liverpool; and the effect upon him was that of a settled disgust with all the ordinary habits of his life, and its fashion altogether. When he thought of returning to the office, to his former routine as clerk, the idea made him sick. It seemed to him that he could do anything, or go anywhere, rather than this. But though the impulse of abandoning all he had

been or done hitherto was instantaneous, he could not quite settle in a moment, with the same rapidity, what he was to do, or be, in the future. He crossed to the other side of the great river with his little bag of "needments," the linen Mrs. Eadie had bought for him and a few other indispensable things which he had himself procured, and lived in one of the villages there, which have now grown into towns, watching the ships go by, and leaving his mind open to any wandering impulse that might lay hold upon it. In these days the River Mersey was a great sight, as probably it is still. To the idle young man, accustomed to some share in the perpetual commotion of that coming and going, there was meaning in every one of the multitudinous ships that lay at anchor in the great stream, or glided out, full-sail, to the sea, or were poked and dragged away by a restless, toiling little slave of a steam-tug, carrying off its prey like one of the devils of the Inferno. He knew where they were going, and what they had to bring from afar, and all about their bills of lading and the passengers they carried. The river had not to him that grandeur of prose which becomes poetry, and fact which turns to romance, in less accustomed minds; but was only a huge

highway, a big street full of crowds coming and going, over which he brooded, wondering where he should plunge into the tide of movement, and how take his first step out of the horizons which hitherto had bounded him. He did not say, as his mother might have done, "Oh, for the wings of a dove!" but he put that profound breath of human impatience into nineteenth century prose, and said to himself, "If I had but a steamboat, a yacht, anything to take me out of reach of all of them, where they will never hear of me again!" He was not rich enough, however, to hope for a yacht, so that all he could really do was to decide what "boat" he would go with, and whether he should turn his steps across the Atlantic, or choose another quarter of the world in which to become another man.

He went to the office one day, as Philip Selby discovered, and asked for the amount of salary due to him, and purchased a few more necessary articles of clothing; and he wrote to the persons to whom he owed money, telling them that he was about to leave Liverpool, but would send them their money without fail within a certain period. He did not know how this was to be done, but he was resolute to do it, and

he had no more doubt on the matter than he had that he should perfectly succeed in his plunge into the unknown. But after he had done this he remained for some days longer by the river-side with a self-contradictory impulse, watching the ships go by, and putting off the execution of his project. Where was he to go? To resolve to give up his own identity, to separate himself for ever from his family, and all his belongings, and all his antecedents, was easy; but to make up his mind which boat he was to go by, and whither he was to betake himself, was much more difficult. America was so hackneyed, he said to himself, with that fastidious impatience and disgust which is one of the characteristics of a sick soul: everybody goes to America; it would be the first idea that would occur to everyone; and this made him throw away that first suggestion angrily, as if it had been an offence; but if not to America, then where? He tossed about various names in his mind, satisfied with none, and when at last he made his decision, it was made in a moment, with the same kind of sick disgust and impatience as had made him reject the other ideas as they presented themselves. He was crossing the river to Liverpool, leaning

over the side of the ferry steamboat lest anybody should see and recognize him, and in his own mind passing in review the advantages and disadvantages of all the ships he passed. The Mersey was very full and very bright, the sun shining, a brisk breeze blowing, the sky blue, the great estuary throwing up white edges of spray and leaping here and there against the bows of an out-going boat, in a manner which boded little comfort to unaccustomed sailors outside the shelter of its banks. The opposite shore was still clothed with trees beginning to grow green in the earliest tints of spring, and not unpleasantly mingled with the beginnings of docks and traces of mercantile invasion. Nature, as yet, had not given up her harmonizing power; the touches of colour on the masts, a national flag flying here and there, even the sailors' washing fluttering among the yards, was an addition to the brilliancy of the spring lights. The ferry-boat was full of people, though it was not the hour for business men to be moving about. The freight was a more varied one than that mass of black-coated figures which weighed it down to the water's edge in the morning. But Harry turned his back upon them all, and looked over

the side, watching in a dream the long trail of water which slid under the bows and was caught and churned by the paddle-wheel. The motion, as he watched it thus, soothed him, and took the place of thinking in his mind, carrying him vaguely, he knew not whither, just as he would fain have been carried beyond the ken of men. He was waiting the guidance of chance, not caring what became of him. Something caught his ear suddenly as the ferry-boat rustled along by the side of a long low steamer with raking masts and short funnels, which lay not far from the bank.

"I wouldn't go in that boat for the world," some one said. The remark caught Harry's ear, and roused him into mere wantonness of opposition. "Why?" he said to himself aloud. It did not matter whether it was said loud or low, nobody but himself could hear it as he leaned over the rushing water. "I'll go." He was in such a condition of perversity that this was all he wanted to fix his purpose.

He landed on the Liverpool side, no longer languidly, but with the air of a man who has something to do, and went straight to examine the ship and ascertain where to apply for his

passage. She was bound for Leghorn. He went stepping briskly forth to the office of the agent, and then with a mixture of economy and gentility, still conscious of the importance of the family from which he was about to cut himself off, took a passage in what was called the second cabin.

"What name?" said the clerk. What name? he had not considered this question. Should he give his own name, thus leaving a clue to anyone who chose to inquire? The doubt, the question was momentary: "Isaac Oliver," he said, and looked the man in the face as if defying contradiction. But the clerk had no idea of contradicting him; as well Isaac Oliver as Harry Joscelyn to the stranger, who knew nothing about either. Five minutes after he could not tell what had put this name into his head; but his fate was decided, and beyond correction. He went home with a curious feeling in his mind, not sure whether it was amusement, or shame, or anger with himself and fate. It was all three together. He was himself no longer, he had thrown away his birthright. What had tempted him to take the name of Isaac Oliver he could not explain. He laughed, but his laugh was

not pleasant. He was annoyed and appalled and disgusted with himself, but he could not alter that now. All the evening he roamed about the river-bank, looking at the ships going out and in, and the little steamers rustling and fuming across the gleaming water, and all the many coloured symbols and ceaseless industry of the scene, with a strange sense of having lost himself, of having so to speak died in the middle of his life. He could not get over it. He was living in a little inn which had been turned into a sort of suburban tea-garden, instead of the little neat ale-house it once was. The weather was very fine and warm, though it was so early in the season, and every steamboat disgorged a crowd of visitors to sit under the half-open foliage of the trees, and in the damp little arbours. Harry avoided all these visitors in the fear of meeting some one who might know him. Harry! he was not Harry any longer. The mere giving of the false name had changed him. He did not know who he was. He was confused and confounded with the sudden difference. Had some one called out Harry Joscelyn quickly, he thought that it would no longer have occurred to him to answer. He was not Harry Joscelyn; and who was he? The name he had chosen, or

which some malicious spirit had put into his head, seemed to float before him wherever he went. He shuffled in his walk unconsciously as he fled from himself along the margin of the great flood. What had he done? He had abandoned not only his own name and family, but his own condition, his place in life. Wherever he went, he would be known as a peasant, a common countryman, he thought, never thinking in his pre-occupation that the strangers among whom he was going knew just as much about Isaac Oliver as about Harry Joscelyn. The night grew dark, and the great river gleamed with a thousand sparkles of light like glowworms. Little vessels, each with a coloured lantern, went darting across and across, lights swung steadily with a sort of dreamy regular cadence from the stationary ships. The stars above were not more manifold than those little lamps below. The quiet of the night had hushed the sounds of the great city on the other side, and all the heavy hammers and the din of machinery: but still life was busy, coming and going, darting on a hundred messages; pilot boats steaming out to sea, little dark tug-boats bringing back cargoes of souls out of the unknown. But Harry thought of nothing save of

the strange, unpremeditated step he had taken; that one incident filled all the earth to him; a momentary impulse, a deed that was scarcely his, and yet he felt that it would colour all his life. He stayed out till the passenger boats had stopped and all the visitors were gone. The little inn was shut up and dark, all but one little querulous candle sitting up for him, when he went home: home! he called this temporary refuge by that sacred name involuntarily—just such a home he now said bitterly, as he would have for the rest of his life. Fortunately next day the Leghorn boat was to sail, and his new start would be made without time to think about it any more.

Isaac Oliver took possession of his berth next morning. He went on board early, and lounged about the deck all day. For the first time this morning it occurred to him that they might send after him, that his departure could not have passed altogether without notice among his friends. He had not thought of this before, but now it came upon him with some force. They would try to stop him at the last moment. The very name he had chosen would betray him, for who but Harry Joscelyn would call himself Isaac Oliver? He

kept on the further side of the ship, leaning over the bulwarks, and watched everybody who went or came with jealous eyes. Tardy passengers came on board one after another, bringing luggage and new items of cargo and provisions; there was scarcely a moment without some arrival, and every one of them, Harry felt, must be for him. When at last the gangway was detached, the anchor weighed, the latest idler or porter put on shore, and the very screw in motion, he felt sure there must be some last attempt, some appeal from the quay. "Have you one of the name of Harry Joscelyn there?" he thought he could actually hear them calling; and saw the rapid examination of the list of passengers, and the shaking of heads of the captain and his immediate assistants, who were standing together high above all the others. When there could be no longer any doubt that the steamboat was off, and that no appeal of the kind had been made, a quick and hot sense of offence came over Harry. He had been alarmed by the idea of being identified and stopped at the outset of his voyage: but as soon as he was certain that he was to be allowed to proceed peaceably on that voyage, his heart burned within him with a sense

of injury. Now it was indeed all ended and all over, his life, his name, everything to which he had been accustomed in the past. He went below to his berth, with a sense of complete abandonment and desolation which it would be impossible to describe. It appeared to him that until now he had only been playing with the idea, amusing himself with all the preparations for a change which would never really take place, which somehow would be stopped and prevented at the end. But nobody had put forth a finger to stop him, and now the end was accomplished and beyond all remedy. Up to the time he came on shipboard he had not thought of being stopped, but now he felt as if he had expected it all the time, and was grievously injured and heartlessly abandoned by all the world and by all his relations, not one of whom would lift a finger on his behalf. He went down to his shabby berth in the second cabin, and felt much disposed, like his mother, to turn his face to the wall. But, perhaps fortunately for Harry, the sea was rough, and when the vessel steamed out of the Mersey and felt the full commotion of the waves outside, he was sick, and not in a condition to care for anything.

In this way he lost the thread of his trouble for the first two days: and then novelty and excitement began to tell upon him, and he came altogether to himself. No, not to himself: he did not feel clear about who he was or what. He came to—Isaac Oliver, looking that new personage in the face with a bewildered awe of him and wonder at him. Isaac Oliver! who, he wondered vaguely, could he be? not a son of old Isaac, who had only little children—a nephew or a cousin, some off-shoot of the family, if the Olivers could be called a family, a suggestion at which he smiled in spite of himself. That must be who he was, the offspring of a race of peasants, no better blood, no other pretensions. The Joscelyns were a very different class of people, but he had given them up, he had shaken off all bonds between them and himself. "In for a penny, in for a pound," he said to himself, setting his face to it with a smile, as the steamboat bore up along the Italian coast, and "the old miraculous mountains hove in sight." Harry did not feel any special interest in Italy: he was of the class who never travel, and understand but little why one place should be more interesting than another. And, indeed, Leghorn does not sound

like Italy to any traveller. What he knew of it was that it was a busy sea-port, where there were merchants' offices and a thriving trade. He did not interest himself much about anything else. He had his living to make, alone and unbefriended in a strange country: need was that he should collect himself and pluck up a heart and think what he was to do, now that he was so near the place of his destination—or, at least, not what he, but young Isaac Oliver, was to do. Would any merchant take him in without character, without introduction or testimonial? This thought was like a cold breath going through and through him, when he began to think. But he had still a little money in his pocket, and could afford to wait and look about him for a week or two. There is always something turning up in a busy place. And Harry, accustomed to occupation all his life, could not believe that he would ever starve where there was anything to do.

They had touched at various other ports on the way, whose chief claims to be visited were such as Harry had little understanding of, and the eagerness of his fellow-passengers to get on shore and see these places had surprised him.

For his own part, he did not see the fun of going to see a succession of churches and pictures. He had seen but few pictures in his life, and he had never been taught that they were of much importance. He had, indeed, privately, an honest contempt for such things, though he said little about it. He was disposed to ask, "What are you all staring at?" when he was brought face to face with an early Master, a thing which he would have banished into the darkest corner had it been his. But when he got into the harbour at Leghorn he began to feel himself once more *dans son assiette.* He knew what the docks meant, and appreciated the masts of the shipping better than if they had been the most delicate works of art. It was nothing to Liverpool, but it was something he could understand and felt at home with. He landed in better spirits than he had experienced for a very long time. He felt a moral certainty that he should "get on" here.

But what a shock it was when the unaccustomed Englishman stepped first on shore, and found himself in the midst of a strange life, of which he did not understand even the first word! He knew very well, of course, that it was a

foreign place, and that English was not spoken there; but he never had realized that it would be impossible by speaking loudly, or using a sort of broken English, or some other simple contrivance, to make the barbarous natives understand. Even an individual much better educated than poor Harry may be excused if the shock of that extraordinary solitude and isolation which surrounds him when he finds himself incapable of understanding a word of what is going on, is a surprise and irritation as well as a discomfort. He stood on the quay with his little portmanteau by him—after having been rowed over endless links of basins, all full of clear green sea-water, cut like a great jelly by the progress of the boat, to the landing-place—and stood there aghast, and, indeed, agape, hustled by the crowd, and with a grinning porter on each side of him making offers of incomprehensible service. He would not deliver himself over into the hands of any such harpies he was resolved, not even when they addressed him in a word or two of English, though the sound was as balm to his ears. He stood over his portmanteau and angrily pushed the facchini away, but at last got hold of a lad whose appearance pleased him, who was tidier

than the rest. To him Harry said "Hotel?" in a sort of half-questioning, half-suggestive way; but this was not enough to get him clear of the officious crowd, who flew at him with names which conveyed no meaning to his ears. Harry felt like a man caught in a hailstorm as he was pelted with those big sonorous syllables. He grew furious with confusion and bewilderment. He had not been thought specially strong on the Fells, but here his North-country muscles told. He pushed away the crowd, who he thought were making a joke of him, and took up his own portmanteau. "The gentleman is all right," said some one beside him; "you have no education, you are without manners, you others," and somebody took off a hat and made a salutation, somebody who reached to about Harry's elbow. It was civil, and the first part of the sentence had been said in English, so Harry, learning by experience, conquered his wrath, and was civil too. "Can I perhaps indicate a hotel?" this new personage said; "Mister is an English?" Harry stood still and looked down upon his new acquaintance, not quite clear as to the meaning of what he said. He was a little man, small and dainty, dressed with quaint care, with high shirt-

collars, and a large black cravat tied in a bow, and the most shining of black hats, which he took off when he spoke. He was olive-complexioned, with big, dark, soft Italian eyes. "Mister is an English?" he said; "by paternity I am an English, too. I will indicate a hotel if the gentleman chooses. It will deliver him from *la canaglia*, what you call this rabbel," he added, with an ingratiating smile, and a great rattle of his *r's*. It was mere good-nature, but Harry was by no means sure of this, and he knew that foreigners were deceivers. "Thanks, I won't trouble you," he said, abruptly, and lifting his portmanteau—it was not a big one—strode away. He felt angry and depressed, yet excited. The astonished look of the little man, who made him another bow, and replaced his hat with a shrug of his shoulders at the Englishman's want of manners, added to his discomfiture. Perhaps he had made a fool of himself by refusing those good offices which were offered to him, Harry thought. Perhaps he would have been a bigger fool had he accepted. Perhaps they were all in a conspiracy to rob him. He strode on and on, somewhat ashamed of his own appearance with the portmanteau, as if he were too poor to

pay anyone to carry it, and thoroughly bewildered altogether amid the sounds and sights which he did not understand. But at the end he got into an inn where there was some one who spoke English, not such a usual accomplishment in these days as it is now; and where he got a room which was very strange of aspect to the untravelled young man. The half hour which he passed there, seated upon the odd little bed, with his portmanteau at his feet upon the tiled floor, all so strange, so desolate to Harry, was as terrible a moment as he had ever passed in his life. His very soul was discouraged, sunk low in his breast with a kind of physical drop and downfall. It was all he could do not to burst out crying in his forlornness and helplessness and solitude. What could he do in a place where he did not understand a word? In many cases novelty is delightful, but there are some in which it is the most dreadful of all depressing circumstances. Everything, from the dingy tiles under his feet, and the dark eating-room downstairs, with its unaccustomed smells, up to the blaze of the Italian noon, and the incomprehensible tongue that everybody spoke, weighed upon Harry. He covered his face with his hands, sitting there upon

his bed. What evil fate had led him to this unknown place? What should he do without even a name that belonged to him, without a friend? A gasp came into his throat, and the hand that covered his eyes was wet. He felt himself bowed down to the very ground.

After thus "giving way," however, Harry braced himself up, and recovered at least the appearance of courage. He made the best toilette he could by the help of the small washing utensils, which were not so entirely abhorrent to English customs then as they are now—for baths were not very general, and washing-basins were but small, in the first quarter, if not the first half, of this century. And then he sallied forth refreshed—into a new world.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW WORLD.

HARRY strayed about the town during the afternoon, losing his way, and finding it again; but got back to the hotel before the important hour of dinner, of which the English-speaking waiter had informed him. He was less amused than depressed with all he saw. The perpetual talk that seemed to be going on around him—sharp, varied, high-pitched, incomprehensible—gave him at first a sense of offence, as if all these people were doing it on purpose in order to bewilder him, and afterwards a profound feeling of discouragement. He was not clever he was aware. He had never been very great at his school work. and how was he to accomplish the first preliminary, the very initial step of existence here,

the learning of the language, to which he had no clue, and of which he could not make out one word? It seemed to him as if years must elapse before he could master the very rudiments of the new tongue; and how was he to seek for work, or to get work to do, not knowing the very A B C of the life about him? Harry went doubling about the unfamiliar streets, looking with wistful eyes at every passer-by who had the look of an Englishman, and asking himself what he was to do. He did not seem to have any spirit left for the uphill work of learning a language. There rose up before him a vision of the exercises which he had once laboured at, daubing himself with ink, and of the verbs which he had got by heart overnight only to forget them in the morning. To think that he could not even ask his way! Wherever he strayed he looked at the people helplessly, as if he had been dumb, and anxiously examined all the street corners, without venturing to approach any shop, or lay himself open to any encounter. He was more fortunate than might have been expected in this point, for he found the right street corner at last, and the house, with its strange old courtyard, and the long dark *sala* which looked into it, and in which the guests

were already gathering. The house had a good reputation, and the large room was nearly full. Harry, who had never seen anything of the kind before, saw the people take their places, each appropriating his own turned down chair, and half finished bottle of wine, and looked for his own place with a curious sense of the everyday character to the others of all these proceedings, which to him were so unusual. Yesterday, at the same hour, no doubt they had all been here, and last year, and as long as anybody could recollect, munching a slice from the long Italian loaf, the yard of bread which of itself astonished his simple-minded ignorance. To think that with such an air of routine and long establishment this dinner should have been happening methodically every day while he was pursuing his work at Liverpool, or taking his holiday at home. At home! The words sounded like a bitter sarcasm to the young man, who had no home—who had now no identity, no self to fall back upon, but had begun to exist, so to speak, only a few days ago. And to think this table, with all its soils and steams, should have been waiting for him all this time!

"'Ere, Sarr, 'ere," said the English-speaking

waiter, his black eyes rolling in his head with pride and pleasure in this exhibition of his gift of languages. He was holding the back of a chair which had been carefully turned down, and was placed between a fat old Italian, with an enormous depth of double chin, and a small figure, which Harry recognised at once as that of the man who had spoken to him on the quay. "De gentelman speak English," said the waiter, bowing with amiability and pleasure. Harry, it is to be feared, did not appreciate the exertions made in his behalf. The little stranger, on his side, was as smiling and bland as the attendant, delighted to make himself agreeable. They both thought it the most pleasant thing in the world to surprise the sulky and speechless Englishman with a companion to whom he could talk. "Mister have found his way after all to the Leone," said his friend, "I wish myself joy of it. It is what I most did desire. He is the best hotel, the very best hotel in all Livorno. Most of the strangers, what we call forestieri, find their ways here. Mister will find himself very comfortable; the kitchen is excellent, and the chambers—the chambers!" here the little man spread out his hands with ecstatic admiration, "so clean, so

comfortable; everything an Englishman desire."

Harry was cross, and he was suspicious. He thought the reappearance of his first acquaintance looked like a conspiracy, and that probably between the man and the waiter it was an understood thing that the Englishman, who was so ignorant, should be made to pay for his initiation into foreign ways. But he had no intention of being made to pay if he could possibly help it. He had not the slightest understanding of the waiter's benevolent wish to make him comfortable, or the innocent satisfaction of the other, at once in showing off himself and his acquirements and showing kindness to a stranger. Harry did not realize the national character in both, which made them pleased to serve him, and anxiously on the watch for the look of pleasure which they anticipated as their reward. An English servant would have looked on with anticipations of another kind. He would have watched to see the stranger's hand stealing into his pocket: and on this point no doubt Antonio had as sharp an eye as anyone; but his Italian soul, asked for something more; he wanted to see a glow of pleasure in the face of the person to whom he had just, as he thought, done a service. Harry

refused to pay in this wise. His countenance, somewhat dark before, settled down into a heavier gloom. He drew in his chair to the table roughly, losing part of his companion's address: and he did not look at the young man who was talking to him, or give him any recompense for the effort he was making. After a while he made a remark, but it was not a very civil one. "Why do you call me Mister?" was what he said.

The stranger looked at him, complacent still, but yet a trifle abashed—"Because," he said, stroking a small moustache, and fixing his eyes upon Harry with a smiling yet deprecating glance, "I do not know the gentleman's name."

"Even if you don't know a fellow's name," said Harry, ruthless, "it isn't English to say Mister. Mister is a title of contempt." Here the horrified look of his new acquaintance made him pause. "I mean when it's used alone without the name. Low people sometimes use it so—but nobody who speaks decent English," Harry said. As he spoke the stranger's olive countenance caught flame and grew crimson. He laughed an embarrassed, uncomfortable little laugh.

"It is that I am mistaken," he said; "I have not spoke English moch. The gentleman will pardon

my error. My name is Paolo Thompson," he said, with a little wave of the hand, introducing himself.

"You would like to know my name," said Harry. .

The Italian-Englishman replied, not with any expression of offence, but with a smiling bow.

"My name is——" he made a pause. He looked at the interested countenance beside him, a sense of the ludicrous mingling with his suspicious distrust of all strangers and foreigners. What did it matter what he said to a little impostor like this? "Oliver," he added, with a laugh. He almost thought the little fellow, though not an Englishman, must see the incongruity, the absurdity, of associating the name of Oliver with such a person as Harry Joscelyn. It suddenly became a practical joke to him, a masquerade which everyone must see through.

"O—— livr," said little Thompson, with a long emphasis upon the first letter, and a hurried slur over the rest; "that right? alright! Mister O—lvr."

"Not Mister," said Harry, growing benevolent as he felt a little amusement steal over him, and he tried to give his new acquaintance the *nuance* of sound which divides the Mr. of English use

and wont from the two distinct syllables of which Paolo was so fond. They grew friends over this attempt at unity of pronunciation, or rather Harry permitted himself to grow friendly, and to ask himself what harm this little foreigner could do him—a little hop o' my thumb, whom he could lift in one hand. As he laughed over his new friend's attempt to catch the difference of sound, his friendly feeling increased. He felt his superiority more and more, and in that superiority his suspicions melted away. As for little Paolo he took everything amiably. He had no objection to be laughed at.

"You mean not bad," he said, "I know; you mean not to make angry. Laugh, it is a way of us English. My father was an Englishman. I never know him; he was died before I am born; but I too am an English by origin. It is for that I have my place. I am Interpreter. I put what you say in Italian. I put what one would say to you in English. Thus I please to both," said the little man with lively satisfaction; and he laughed when Harry laughed with genuine good faith. Perhaps it was the reaction from his past despondency which made Harry laugh so much, perhaps the little bravado of a stranger

feeling himself gazed at and isolated among a crowd of people alien to him. He attracted the eyes of all the guests at the table-d'hôte especially of some Americans who had come in late, and one other Englishman who regarded him gloomily from the other end of the table, and concluded that his countryman was having too much to drink, but that it was not his business. Harry was not taking too much to drink; he was making wry faces at the sour Nostrali, which was the only wine provided without a special order. Harry did not understand any wine except Port and Sherry, and he despised the sour stuff of which he took one big gulp and no more; he did not know what else to order, and he did not like to mix up Paolo in his affairs so far as to ask his advice on this point. Paolo for his part was drinking a little of his wine in a tumblerful of water, not without some alarm lest the *eau rougie* should go to his head. He told Harry all his story as they sat together. His father had been an English clerk, sent out from England to an office in Leghorn, who had married an Italian girl, and died in the first year of their marriage. Paolo was very proud of that fine and aristocratic name of Thompson, of which there was a Lord

and many Sirs, he informed Harry with great but smiling seriousness; his mother, though she had been so young, would never re-marry herself, though pressed on all sides to do so—such was her devotion to her youthful husband who was English, and to the romantic and euphonious name which he had left her. The young man grew every moment more friendly. Harry's suspicions all floated away as he listened to the story, and laughed at the accent and grammar of his new acquaintance, who laughed too with perfect good-humour. Thompson—he was a fit associate for an Oliver, Harry said to himself, knowing nothing about any Oliver save Isaac whose name he had appropriated. After dinner was over Paolo proposed that they should go for a stroll; and though Harry had done nothing else but stroll all the afternoon with very small advantage, yet he was quite willing to begin again with the aid of his friend's knowledge. It was less lonely than sitting in the dreadful little room of which Paolo had ventured to say that it was so comfortable, and exactly what an Englishman liked. Harry shuddered at the thought; he had never been used to sit in his bedroom, and he could not but feel it a sort of humiliation that he

had no other room to sit in. His new friend was a wonderful example of costume to the untrained taste of Harry. He wore trousers of a large check, but a black evening coat over them, a large shirt-front, a black ribbon at his neck tied in a bow, and varnished shoes. He was very well contented with his appearance. When he added an opera-hat to all this finery, the sensation in his little bosom of thorough self-content was very warm. Harry could not but laugh at the little exquisite, whose gorgeous apparel was so unlike anything he had ever seen.

"I don't know if I dare to walk out in my coloured clothes with such a swell as you are, Thompson," he said. Paolo looked down upon himself delighted. He knew he was well-dressed.

"You are all right," he said, "an English, that covers all; but when one is only by origin, more must be done. Komm a-long." He stretched up his hand, which he had just clothed in light kid, to Harry's arm, who had no gloves, nor any other advantage. The Angelus was sounding from all the churches as they set out. Harry could not but wonder if there was an evening sermon, or if it was a series of prayer-meetings which were going on. He was much surprised that foreigners should have

such devout habits. It surprised him, too, to see how soon it got dark; but as it happened there was a brilliant moon which soon made the streets as light as day. And as soon as the sacred hour of sunset, the fatal hour which Italians dread, was over, the streets filled with a crowd which still more surprised Harry. Before all the cafés the pavements were crowded—not only men, but women, seated at the little tables enjoying the freshness of the lovely evening, and making such a hum and babble of talk as nothing but an unknown tongue can produce. A language which is familiar to us never sounds so like an uproar and tumult as one that is unintelligible. Harry's first thought was that the people about him were all quarrelling; his second that this chatter was the riotous and boundless gaiety which he had always heard attributed to "foreigners;" but the scene amused him, though it was so unintelligible, and by and by a degree of toleration which years at home could not have conveyed to him, began to penetrate his mind. Perhaps after all it was only the different habits of these unknown people, and neither quarrelling nor riot. Sometimes one would jump up in the midst of a conversation as if impelled by a sudden outburst of fury, and

address his friends, gesticulating wildly; but after Harry had taken the alarm, and sat ready to strike in if any harm happened, he noticed that the friends of the violent person took it quite calmly, turning upon him looks which were full of smiling placidity, and evidently fearing nothing. In the same way when two men were threading their way along the street together, one would suddenly drop the other's arm, and standing still, discourse with every mark of excitement for a minute, then resume his friend's arm and go on again as if there had been no interruption. An Englishman would have knocked down his adversary with much less demonstration. Harry felt himself obliged to pause too, and give an eye to these personages; and when he also sat down with his companion at one of the little tables, his attention to Paolo's doubtful English was constantly interrupted by the same supposed need of watchfulness in case the party next to them should come to blows. But all the other people took it quite quietly, to Harry's great surprise.

"Why do these beggars jump up in that way and look as if they were going to knock some other fellow down?" Harry said at last.

"Beggares?" said Paolo, looking round hastily;

and then, for he was a young man anxious to improve himself and quick of apprehension, he jumped at the Englishman's meaning. "Ah! that is English for questi Signori, these gentlemen? beggares! capisco, capisco!" said Paolo, clapping his hands as at an excellent joke; "they do nothing but make a little conversation, what you call talk, —these beggares;" and he burst forth once more into a genial peal.

Harry was half pleased to have achieved such a facile success, and half alarmed lest perhaps Paolo might be laughing at him. He said with a suppressed growl, "Conversation! do you call that conversation? I thought they were going to fly at each other's throats."

"No, no, no—never fly at each other's throats; they have too much education," said Paolo; "it is the Italian animation, that is all. An English is what you call quiet He talks down here, not out of his mout," and Paolo beat himself upon the breast, and pointed to about the spot out of which Harry's deep bass proceeded. Harry was by no means pleased with this familiarity, but he reflected that the little man was his only friend among all these strangers, and subdued his displeasure. He did not know very well what to do

with the pink syrup that was furnished him to drink: that, and the sour wine, and the black coffee, were all alike out of Harry's way. Oh, that he could have had but one mighty draught of English beer to clear all these cobwebs out of his throat! But this was an indulgence, like so many others, to be hoped for no more.

After Paolo had sipped the rosolio which Harry contemplated with such a mingling of alarm and disgust, they got up and continued their walk. By-and-bye, in the full moonlight, they strolled towards the port, and walked about on the quays, among the shipping, which threw up its black lines of masts, and dark lace of cordage against the silvery light of which the sky was full. Harry was interested about all this, much more than about churches or pictures. And he threaded his way among the ropes, and piles of barrels and cases with which the quays were encumbered, with a stir of curiosity and hope. Should he find his life and work within the circle which surrounded these instruments of wealth? He paid but little attention to the talk of his companion as they went along. He seemed to see once more the new career before him which he had been doubting an hour or two before. It

was not a very magnificent prospect: yet work that suited him might surely be found when there were goods to be exported, and counting houses to look after these goods. He did not know what might become of him in this strange place, but whatever his fortune might be it was all he could look forward to, and his mind seemed to take a new start from the appearance before him of a possibility, a strain of existence which he understood. He forgot, as he listened to Paolo's chatter going on by his side—which filled him with a vague, superficial sense of superiority—all about the new language to be learned, and the difficulties which had almost overwhelmed him in the afternoon. Thus he went on, allowing his companion to talk, and thinking his own thoughts, till they emerged from the immediate regions of the basins and docks and came back to the streets. They were crossing one which was very dimly lighted, and which Paolo informed him led into the better quarter of the town, when they came in sight, or, rather in hearing, of a party of sailors in a noisy state of exhilaration. What could they have been drinking, Harry wondered, thinking of the sour wine and the rosolio, to make them so convivial?

They were singing rude choruses, and making night hideous with jokes and loud laughter, bearing a wonderful family resemblance to noises of the same kind which Harry had heard near the port of Liverpool—when there suddenly crossed the moonlit-road, between the revellers and the two orderly passengers, a couple of female figures moving rapidly, figures very easily identified as those of an elder and younger woman—a sedate and ample personage, with a girl clinging to her. Two of the sailors, with a holloa of satisfaction, started forward in pursuit. They overtook the women when they were close to Harry and his companion, and one of them seized the girl by the arm. She gave a frightened cry, and the other woman, throwing her arm round her, pushed the men away, pouring forth a volley of rapid Italian, of which Harry of course did not understand a word. He made a stride forward to the fray. Paolo, on his side, who was small and not valorous, did his best to hold him back.

"It is not our business," he said, with a certain faltering in his voice.

"Tell them to let go the girl," said Harry, with brief determination.

"It is not our business," said the alarmed interpreter.

"Tell them they had better let go that girl," repeated the young Englishman.

Then little Paolo stood forth, with a courage which was not his own, and addressedthe sailors. He took off his hat with the utmost politeness and remonstrated. Harry, beginning, by dint of hearing them repeated, to distinguish the words, at last understood that "Questo Signor" must mean himself; but the sailors treated the remonstrance with contempt. The other one took hold of the girl by the other arm, while she screamed, and her companion raved and scolded at them, pushing and struggling with all her might. Harry stepped forward into the moonlight. He lifted up his clenched fist and his big bass voice. "Let go that girl," he shouted in good English, with a voice that roused all the echoes. The men did not know a word he said; but they understood him, which was more to the purpose. They let go their hold in a minute, and stood staring at the intruder as sheepishly as any Englishmen could have done, and perhaps also with a touch of shame. Little Paolo, trembling yet triumphant, kept close to the champion, while he stood and faced them, ready for what-

ever might happen. It was not for nothing that Harry was a Joscelyn. He stood well up to them with a watchful eye and a ready arm. The women had escaped under cover of this unexpected interposition from their first assailants, but another pursuer by this time had got upon their track. "Let's have a look at your face, my pretty lass," this lout said, as he rolled along. Harry's blood was up in a moment. "Oh, by Jove!" he cried, as if the sound of his native tongue had been the last aggravation, "this is too much. I know what to say to you, at least, my fine fellow," and he turned upon his countryman like lightning, and promptly knocked him down. "I am not going to stand any nonsense from *you*," he said.

It was the affair of a moment—no more. The women flew along the street, disappearing up the nearest opening. Harry strode on after them with his blood up, but walking with the most dignified tranquillity. He would not even turn round to see what had happened. "If he thought I was going to stand *him*," he said, as he went along, "that fellow, by Jove! but he was in the wrong box." As for little Paolo, between fright and admiration, he was at his wit's end. He danced along,

now hurrying Harry on, now facing the other way, walking backwards to keep the other party in sight, and uttering alarmed entreaties. "Run! run! What if you 'ave kill him?" he cried. "Vergene Santissima! they are coming. You 'ave done it now, you 'ave done it, and no one to help. Per Bacco! and he goes as if it were a festa. Run, Mister, run!"

"I told you not to call me Mister," said Harry, walking on with perfect coolness and at his ordinary pace. Paolo was half beside himself. "Perhaps you have kill a man," he cried, "and you stop to set right my English—at such a moment——"

"Pooh!" said Harry; he would not have quickened his steps for a fortune. "Don't you know the beggar is an Englishman? A broken head won't hurt him. Let's keep the women in sight, they might get into more trouble." Paolo followed him, trembling and hurried as they got further off; but the noisy sailors were busy about their fallen comrade, and made no attempt to follow. They were too much startled by the summary proceedings of the stranger, and kept back by a certain sense of justice which seldom fails in such an affray. The little Italian kept close to Harry

like a dog, rushing about him, now a little in advance, now a little behind. "He 'ave pick himself up," he said, looking back. "Dio! how the English understand each other! He is not kill."

"Killed!" cried Harry, contemptuously. "It takes more than that to kill an Englishman, even a beast like that fellow. You may palaver with your own kind, but I know what to do with mine. Come along, Thompson. Where have those women gone?"

Here Paolo caught him by the arm, dragging him into the narrow street by which the flying figures had disappeared. One side of it was in almost perfect darkness, while the other was white and brilliant in the moonlight. "You like to know who it was," he said. "Per Bacco! I know."

"It does not matter to me who it was," said Harry, "so long as they are safe, that is all I care for. Women have no business to be out so late at night."

At this Paolo nodded his head a great many times in assent. "But that is English too," he said. "How you are strange! You let a young lady go in the street, and you kill a man, and never think more of it! and the man when he

is kill, get up and walk away instead of to avenge himself! You are strange, very strange. I understand you very well, for I am an English too."

After this somewhat startling incident, however, they did not linger long on their way. It had stirred the blood in Harry's veins and given him the new start he wanted. There is nothing like a new incident for familiarising the mind with any great change in this life. Hitherto he had thought of nothing but his own transmogrification. Now he had something else to think of. He got back to his inn unmolested and uninterrupted, and he found his dreary little room not so dreary when it became a shelter for his fatigue, and a refuge in which to think over the strange excitement of this first new day.

CHAPTER III.

SETTING OUT IN LIFE.

NEXT morning Harry was woke by the appearance of his little friend at his bedside. For a moment it was all fantastic to him like a dream, the narrow slip of room with its tall walls, and straight windows, and the strange little figure by his bedside. "Hallo," he said, "who are you, and what do you want?" opening his sleepy eyes, and springing up in bed. Paolo retreated with a little alarm.

"I go to the bureau," he said, "but before I go I am here to say good morning. What will you do without me?" the little man added with great simplicity. "Get lost, get into what you call skrape. Antonio, he speak a little. I come to advise that you take him with you. It will be only five lire, not very moche for an English."

"I wish you could remember," said Harry pettishly, "to say an Englishman. An English is no sense: you never hear *me* say that."

"Alright," said Paolo good-humouredly. "I will remember; but it will be better to take Antonio; he shows you everything, all the palaces and streets, and you give him cinque lire—five," holding up his fingers spread out to show the sum, and counting them with his other hand, "and you talk, he tell you things in Italian, you make a lesson out of him," he added with a grin, showing all his white teeth.

It was a sensible suggestion, but Harry was perverse. "That is all very well," he said, "but I don't care about seeing your palaces; what I want is to get something to do. Ain't there a *Times*, or something with advertisements? where a fellow could see what's wanted?"

Paolo looked at him with a doubtful air, and his head on one side like a questioning sparrow. He was so small and so spare, and Harry so big, stretched out in the small bed which could not contain him, that the simile held in all points. It appeared unnecessary that he should do more than put out his hand to make an end altogether of his adviser, and there seemed a con-

sciousness of this in the little man himself, who, recollecting last night, hopped a little farther off every time that Harry advanced leaning on his elbow, and projecting himself out of bed.

"You bring letters, you are recommended?" he said. "No?" A cloud came over Paolo's face; then he brightened again. "You come with me," he said. "The Consul, that is the prince of the English—man. You come wid me, and I will recommend you. I will introduce you. He have much confidence, what you call trost, in me."

"But you don't know anything about me," said Harry.

Paolo looked at him with an effusion of admiration and faith, "Siamo amici," he said, laying his hand upon his heart with a sentiment and air which to the cynical Englishman were nothing less than theatrical. But Harry did not understand what the words meant.

"That is all very well," he said again, supposing that this was a mere compliment without meaning. "But what could you say about me? nothing! You don't know me any more than the Consul does—or anybody here."

"Between friends," said Paolo, "there is not the need of explanation. I understand you, Mister.

Are you a Christian or a Protestant," he added quickly, "have you a name of baptism, perhaps?" Paolo did not want to hurt the feelings of his new friend in case he was not provided with this article. But Harry's pride was wounded to the quick.

"A Christian," he cried, "or a Protestant? I am both a Protestant and a Christian! I never heard such horrible intolerance in all my life. It is you who are not Christians, you papists praying to idols—worshipping saints, and old bones, and all sort of nonsense." Harry was so much in earnest that his face grew crimson, and Paolo retreated yet another step.

"You heat yourself; but it is not needed," he said, waving his hand with deprecating grace. "Me, I am above prejudices. Here one calls one's self Giovanni or Giacomo, or Paolo, as with me; and when the person is respectable of years, Ser Giovanni or Ser Giacomo; but if one has not a name of baptism, it is the same, that make no difference——"

"Do you take me for a heathen that never was christened?" cried Harry. "My name is——" here he stopped and laughed, but grew redder, with a dusky colour; but "in for penny in for a pound," as he had already remarked to himself—

" my name is Isaac—Isaac Oliver, as I told you," he said.

" Bene, bene !" said Paolo. " It is enough, I will say to the consul: here is Mister Isaac, who is my friend. He is English—man; yes, I recollect —man ; and I respond for him. He will be so condescending as to take a situation ; he will interpret like me ; he will make the Italian into the English, and the English into the Italian."

" But how can I do that ?" said Harry, " when I don't understand one word of your lingo ? I can't do that."

Paolo's countenance lengthened once more; but he speedily recovered himself.

" That will teach itself," he said. " I will talk ; I will tell you everything. Aspetto ! there is now, presently, incessantly—an occasion. Komm, komm along; something strikes me in the head. But silence, the Vice-Consul, he it is that will settle all."

Harry did not think much of Paolo's recommendation; but yet the idea of appealing to the Vice-Consul was worth consideration. The thought of an Englishman to whom he could tell his story—or if not his story, yet *a* story, something which would seem as an account of himself—was like a

rope thrown out to him amid a waste of waters. And, as an Englishman, he would have a right to be listened to. English officials are not like American, the natural vassals of their countrymen; but still, when a man is at his wit's end, there is something in the idea that a person of authority, in whom he has a vested interest, is within reach, which is consolatory. To be introduced to this functionary, however, by Paolo, whose position did not seem to be very important, did not please Harry's pride. He sent the little fellow away with a vague promise of thinking of it, which disappointed the friendly little man. Paolo could not restrain his anxious desire to be of use. He went off to the Farmacia to buy soap and tooth-powder for his amico, and even proposed to fetch him the little bicchierino of acquavite, with which some people begin their day, a proposal which filled Harry with horror. Paolo put his dressing-table in order with the care of a woman, and lingered, anxious to do something more. He would have brushed his friend's clothes, if Harry would have let him. He was proud of his new discovery, the big Englishman, whom he had secured to himself, and whom he admired in proportion to his own smallness and inconsiderable-

ness. Something of the pleasure of a nurse with an infant, and of a child with a new toy, was in his bustling anxious delight. When at last, however, he was half forced, half persuaded to go away, Paolo made a few steps back from the door and held up a warning finger.

"Mister Isaack mio," he said, "one must not any more knock down. It is not understood in Livorno. That which can well do itself in England is different: here—it is not understood." His face had become very grave, then a deprecatory smile of apology broke over it. "In Italy they are in many things behind," he said. "It is not—understood."

"Don't be afraid, Paul-o," said Harry, laughing, "I shan't knock down anyone to-day. Even in England we don't do it but when it is necessary. You may trust me, I shall knock nobody down to-day.

"Alright, alright!" said Paolo, with a beaming countenance. He turned back again to instruct his friend at what hour it would be best to come to the bureau. "I will speak, and you shall be expected. I will respond for you," the little man said.

At last he went away full of amiable intentions and zeal in his friend's cause, zeal which deserved

a better reward. For Harry did not build much upon the influence of Paolo. It hurt his pride to think of presenting himself anywhere under the wing of this little Italian clerk. He would stand upon his own qualities, he said to himself, not upon the ready faith and rash undertaking of a stranger; but though he put it in this way, it was not in reality because he objected to Paolo's trust in him, or thought it rash as another man might have done, but because he felt himself Paolo's social superior. It would be hard to say on what this consciousness was founded. Harry's only superiority had been his family, and that he had put away. As he was dressing, he turned over a great many things in his mind which he might say to the Vice-Consul. Few young people understand how much better policy it is in all such cases to speak the truth than to invent the most plausible of stories, and Harry was not wiser than his kind. He made up various fictions about himself explaining how it was that he thus presented himself alone and unfriended in an altogether strange place—all of which he would have stated with a faltering tongue and abashed countenance, so as to impress the falsehood of them upon the hearer;

for to invent excuses is one thing, and to produce them with force and consistency another. Successful lying, like everything else, wants practice; few men can succeed in it who only do it once in a way. It requires study, and careful consideration of probabilities, so that the artist shall not be put entirely out by an unforeseen question: and it needs an excellent memory, to retain all that has been said, so as not to contradict previous statements. Harry possessed none of these qualities, but then he was not aware of the want of them; and the thing which made him depart from tale after tale was not any suspicion of their weakness, or his weakness, but an inability to please himself in the details of his romance. And then the thought of going as it were hat in hand, to ask the Consul to provide him with employment, and the inevitable starting forth of little Paolo to pledge himself for everything his friend might say, discouraged him. He grew downhearted as he put himself into the best apparel he had, and brushed his hair, and endeavoured to look his best. Would it not be better to start off again, to go, though he had made up his mind against it, to America after all? There, there would be no language to learn, no

difficulty in understanding what was said to him. He went down and swallowed his breakfast, coffee and bread, which seemed to him the most wretched fare, turning this over in his mind. But for one thing he did not like to be beaten; no Englishman does, he said to himself; and Harry was of the primitive, simple kind of Englishman who clings to all national characteristics. He could not bear to be beaten, to contradict himself as it were, and depart from his plan. While he was thinking of all this, however, a brilliant expedient occurred to him. Though he was reluctant to tell his own story, he was not disposed to screen himself by any fiction of excuses from the consequences of anything he had done; and it was undeniable that he had "got into a row" on the previous night. No Englishman, he reflected, would think the worse of a young fellow who had knocked down a drunken sailor to prevent him from molesting a woman; but it would be as well to go and tell the story of this little incident in case of any ulterior proceedings. Harry fairly chuckled over his own wisdom in hitting upon so admirable a way of presenting himself to the representative of his country. He had never before felt himself so clever. He munched his dry bread and drank

his coffee with a wry face, but something like a mental relish at least. Little Paolo's friendly conscience would not need to be strained. He would be able to bear witness of the facts in all sincerity, and, if anything were to come of it, there would be at least a friend in court, a valuable advocate secured. Antonio, the waiter, drew near while Harry came to this conclusion, and watched him dispatching his simple refreshment with friendly looks. The Italians admired the young Englishman's fine limbs, and height and strength, and they made a pet of him because he was a stranger and helpless; perhaps the waiter was not without an eye to substantial rewards, but he had at the same time a most friendly eye to Harry's helplessness, and an amiable desire to make him comfortable. He stood and watched him eating with sympathy.

"Ze gentleman would like an egg, perhaps, Sarr?" he said.

"I should like half-a-dozen," said Harry with a sigh; "but no, no, never mind—never mind; for the present this will do."

"Ze gentlemen Italian eat no breakfast," said Antonio; "ze eat—after; but I will command for ze English gentleman, if it makes pleasure to

him, ze English breakfast. There is already one here."

"One—breakfast!" said Harry, surprised.

"One," said Antonio, with a finger in the air, "English-man, and two tree Americans; ze eat of ze beef in ze early morning. It is extraordinary: eat of ze beef when you comes out of your bed. But it is the same—it is the same; that makes nothing to our padrone; and I will command it for ze gentleman if he will."

"I wish you would," said Harry, "another time; dry bread is not much to breakfast upon: and the bread is very queer stuff."

"It is good bread," said Antonio, "Sarr, very good bread; bettare far than ze bread of London;" he nodded his head as he spoke with self-satisfaction. "Ze gentleman would like me go wid him—show him all ze places, and ze grand catedral, and all that ze English gentleman go over ze world to see?"

"No, Antonio; I don't care about cathedrals, but you can come with me to the English Consul's if you like, and show me the way."

"I like very moche, Sarr," said Antonio, with a grin. "Ze English gentlemans please me. Zey is astonished at everyting. Ze pictures—O!

bellissimi! and ze palazzi, and ze churches. It is noting but O! and O! as long as zey are walking about. But, Sarr," said Antonio, coming closer, "Livorno is not moche. It is a city of trade. Com to Firenze, Sarr, if you would see beautiful pictures and beautiful houses. Ah! that is something to see. Or to Venezia—better still. I am of Venezia, Sarr. Ze gentleman will not say to Signor Paolo that I tell him so, but Livorno—pouff!" Antonio blew it away in a puff of disdain. "Firenze and Venezia, there is where you will see pictures—everyware—of Raphael and Michael Angelo, and Tiziano, and——"

"I don't care much about pictures," said Harry, calmly. "I like the shipping better. You can take me to the docks if you like. I don't want you to tell me about them. I like to see things I know about myself. But I tell you what, Antonio, you may teach me the names in Italian, if you like; that will always be making a little progress," Harry said, suddenly bethinking himself of Paolo's suggestion.

Antonio's face had lengthened by several inches. An English gentleman who did not want to see pictures was a personage of whom he had no un-

derstanding. He began to think that Harry was not a genuine Englishman after all.

"Ze signor is perhaps Tedesco—no? Or Americain—no? I have known many English," said Antonio, gravely, "but zey all run after ze pictures. Ze gentleman is what you call an original. Benissimo! that makes noting to me. Ze sheeps in ze harbour are very fine sheeps. You will not see no bettare—no, not in England. Ze signor wishes—eh?—perhaps to make observations, to let ze Government—ze ministers know, Italy is now a great country, and ze others are jealous. You fear we will take ze trade all away?"

"Not so bad as that, Antonio," said Harry, with a great laugh. "Where I have come from I wish I could show you the docks; they are about ten times as big as these."

Antonio grinned from ear to ear. He did not believe a word of what Harry said. "If it pleases to ze gentleman," he said, laughing too. He was perfectly tolerant of the joke, and glad to see his *protegé* cheerful. Then Harry jumped up from the table, poorly sustained for the business he had in hand by his light meal, but somewhat anxious to get through the ordeal

he had proposed to himself. Antonio, however, who appeared presently in the well-worn and assiduously brushed costume of a *laquais de place*, could not quite let him off the inevitable sight-seeing. He led him to the Duomo and into the great Square with a pretence that this was on the way to the Consul's office, and made him look at again, whether he would or not, the same public buildings which he had gazed at dreamily as he wandered about the streets the day before, and looked at languidly in the moonlight under Paolo's active guidance. He had been but twenty-four hours in Leghorn, and already he had associations with the street-corners, which probably he would never forget. Already this new world was acquiring known features of acquintanceship; his life beginning to put forth threads like a spider's web, and twist and twine, the new with the old. It startled Harry to feel that he was no longer a stranger here, where he had landed so forlorn. After the round which Antonio beguiled him into making, it was about eleven o'clock before they reached the door over which the well-known British symbol was put up. The outer office was full of people and business, sea-captains and merchants' clerks, and even a few examples of the

kind of traveller who is most common in Italy, he who travels for pleasure and not for business. Harry had to wait among the rest who were seeking an audience of the Vice-Consul. Here Antonio left him, and he could not see anything like the olive-countenance and brilliant costume of Paolo; but it was an English group among which he stood. The clerks even spoke English, if one or two of them displayed the tongue-tied hesitation which is common to all classes when they speak a language imperfectly understood. One of the tourists did his best to draw Harry into conversation, lamenting the cruel fate which had detained him in such a place. He was just starting for Pisa, this pilgrim said, where there was really something to see. "One might as well be in Liverpool as here," he said. Harry did not make any reply. This was just the reason why he himself approved of Leghorn more than of any other place he had seen. When it came to his turn at last, almost all the other appellants and petitioners had been seen and dismissed. They all wanted something; and Harry's new acquaintance had talked and worried him so much with his dislike to a place where there was so little to see, that he had almost forgot the manner

in which he had arranged with himself to open his own story; when at length everybody else was despatched, and he had to go forward to his audience. His heart beat a little faster as he went in. The Vice-Consul was a man of a portly presence, something like an English merchant of the higher class, with grizzled hair, and an aspect of great respectability and authority. He was fully conscious of his dignity as the representative of the British Government, and of Her Majesty herself, amid an alien and inferior race. He did not think much of Italy or the Italian people, and he felt it was his mission in life to keep them down. He was seated in great state upon a large chair, which swung round with him when he moved. His table, his papers, the manner in which he appeared over them, with the air of a judge on the bench, was very imposing to a stranger, especially when that stranger was in difficulty and came to ask help. He made Harry a very formal bow, and pointed to a seat near, which had something of the air of a seat for the prisoner at the bar.

"What can I do for you?" he said, with a dignified inclination of his head; after the first glance his look softened. He was used to see a great many people, and it was a compliment to

Harry's appearance that it interested the Vice-Consul. He almost smiled upon him, with a benignity in which he did not very often indulge.

Then it was that Harry's real difficulties began; but how thankful he was that it was a true story he was telling, and not a fictitious account of himself!

"I came to tell you, Sir," he said, "of something that occurred last night—a scrape—that is to say a row I got into. I suppose I must call it a row."

"It is a great pity when strangers get into rows in a foreign town, Mr.——Oliver. I think you said Oliver?"

What a fool I was thought Harry!—as he did after every new production of that name; but his last chance of reclaiming his own was now over.

"What you say is quite true," he said, "and I should not have been such a fool but for urgent cause. I knocked down a fellow who was annoying a lady. He deserved a great deal more than I gave him; if he had been an Italian I might have hesitated, but he was an Englishman. So I just knocked him down."

"Very wrong, very wrong," said the Vice-Consul, "and a curious way of showing your preference for your fellow-countrymen. But you

had better tell me all about it. When did this occur, and where?"

Harry described the place as well as he could. "There was a lot of them," he said. "The Italians—if they were Italians—gave way when I spoke to them. I'll do them that justice. The English fellow, I did not say anything to him. I was not going to argue with a brute like that. I just quietly knocked him down. It was a young lady and a woman with her. You see, if I had stood there talking, the others might have been up to us, and have given her more annoyance. I daresay it did not hurt the fellow much; and if he's a man he'll take it quietly, for he deserved it; but I thought it was perhaps best to let you know."

The Vice-Consul had started slightly when Harry described, as well as he could, the locality in which this incident took place. Now he asked quickly, "And the lady—did you know her? and did she get clean away?"

"Know her!" said Harry, "I only arrived here yesterday; besides I did not want to know her: it might not have been pleasant for her. We watched her safe out of reach; indeed we went on till we heard a door shut where she lived,

I suppose. No, it was not for that. It was to say that if the fellow complained, or brought any action, or anything of that sort—I wanted you, Sir, being the representative of England, to know the real facts. That is how it was."

There was a smile about the Vice-Consul's mouth. "As it happens I have heard about it already," he said. "I'll speak to you farther on the subject by-and-bye— Don't be alarmed, it will do you no harm; sit down and rest yourself, and wait for a few minutes. I am going in to lunch presently, and I'll talk to you then," the Vice-Consul said. Harry did not know what to think. The consequences could not be very bad, since this great functionary restrained a smile; but there was evidently a second chapter to the adventure. Harry withdrew as he was directed to the other end of the office, and there stood gazing at railway time-tables, and pictures of ships. There was all about a line of vessels to America from Genoa which had lately been established, just the very thing for him if he intended to do what he had been thinking of. But Harry scarcely knew what he was looking at. All these questions seemed things of the past. What was the Vice-Consul going to say to him? What was to come of it? Till he knew this he couldnot think of anything else.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VICE-CONSUL'S DAUGHTER.

A DOOR in the Vice-Consul's office opened into a long passage with a row of windows on one side, which communicated with his house. When the hour came at which, after the comfortable fashion of leisurely Italian towns, the office was shut up for the midday meal, the Vice Consul made Harry an amiable sign to follow. He led him through this passage, which looked upon a courtyard full of plants, where a fountain trickled in the sunshine, into a large cool room with all its *jalousies* closed, and in which for a minute or two he saw nothing. He was being introduced into a sort of enchanted country it seemed, unlike anything he had ever known or thought of; the tiled floor was almost covered with

soft rugs, according to a fashion not then known in England, and the furniture dimly discerned in the gloom, was like rocks at sea to the stranger who had no chart of the confused and intricate passage. Something white in a corner, something which moved a little when they came in, was all he saw, and he could not make out even what that was till his eyes had got accustomed to the light. Then he perceived with a great tremor and shock of shyness that it was a lady, a slight girl in a white dress who looked up to nod to her father, then seeing a second figure behind him, rose hastily with a shy grace. Harry was still more shy than she was. He was not accustomed to the society of ladies. And he was dreadfully hungry, having had nothing but that dry bread and coffee, a circumstance which made him still more depressed and timid. He did not at all know why he was introduced so suddenly into this other world. He thought he was only going to an inner office, or perhaps—but that was a blessedness he dared scarcely hope for—that the Consul in his kindness had meant to give him some luncheon. But the drawing-room confused him wholly; he had done nothing to merit such an introduction. He only half took in accordingly the meaning of

the words the Consul said, "Look here, Rita, I have brought your champion of last night."

"Oh!" That purely English exclamation sounded to Harry the sweetest syllable he had ever heard. The white figure came a step forward. By this time he began to see through the gloom, and what he saw was a very young face, with two great dark eyes, lifted to him full of wonder and pleasure. Then a hand was put out, "Was it you?" she said eagerly. "Oh, yes, I remember!" And before he was aware the hand, smaller and softer than any such article previously known to him, touched his for a moment. Harry dropped into the chair which the Vice-Consul pointed to him in utter confusion of surprise. He was not even able to notice what an extraordinary advantage to him such an introduction was. He was simply astonished more than words could say.

"This is Mr. Oliver," said the Vice-Consul. "He came and told me all about it without a notion who you were. And you see how surprised he is. He thought, I suppose, I was taking him into a kind of genteel prison. It must be added that, if you only arrived yesterday, you lost no time in getting into a row."

"Did you only arrive yesterday?" said the

delightful little voice, in which there was a flavour of something not English, though the English was perfect. "Oh, how glad I am that you did arrive then! What would have become of us otherwise? for no one but an Englishman wandering about the most unlikely places could ever have found himself just there."

"And nobody but an English girl would have risked herself in such a place," said the father. "I hope you will take that to heart, my dear. This girl," he added, turning to the young man, "is by way of despising all Italian precautions. She is an English girl, she tells everybody, and she will not be a slave like the others: and old Benedetta is an old fool and never goes against her. One of her pensioners was ill last night, that was why the monkey was out at such an hour. When I am at the Club there is nobody to put her to bed."

"As if I was a little child to be put to bed! It was the dearest old woman, and she would see me. The priest had been sent for and the sacraments; could I refuse to go—now could I? And how was I to know men were so dreadful? But you see, papa, there are always the good angels about."

"When I was young the angels were all feminine," the Vice-Consul said, "and we called the ladies by these pretty names, not the ladies us."

"Perhaps you never did so much for any girl. Oh, how frightened I was when that man took hold of my arm! and then to hear an English voice as if it were coming from the skies, 'Let go that girl!'"

"How did the fellow understand, I wonder?" the Vice-Consul said.

"If I had not been so frightened I should have laughed. They did not understand a bit! It might just as well have been Greek; but if it had been Greek they would have understood," cried Rita, putting her hands together with grateful enthusiasm. All this time Harry had never spoken a word; indeed, there had been no opening for him to speak.

"You must have thought me a big idiot to say anything at all," he said.

"Oh! I thought you —— I won't tell you what, or papa will say something disagreeable. It was so grand the English voice; and then their hands dropped as if I had been fire."

"I should have broken every bone in their bodies," cried Harry, with unnecessary fervour, "if

I had known it was *you* they touched with their filthy fingers!" He did not know why he made this violent speech, which was far from elegant, and quite unsuitable to the refined and still atmosphere in which he so unexpectedly found himself. As for Rita she blushed a little, and laughed a little, in the soft green twilight, finding it not unnatural that he should have been doubly indignant at the idea that it was *she* who was in danger. She was accustomed to believe that anything disagreeable was doubly offensive when it happened to her, and that she was about the most important little person in the world. But she was one of the rare people whom such a knowledge does not spoil. It seemed to her quite simple—was not she her father's only child, and only pleasure in life? She had been aware of this fact ever since she was born.

"Hush, hush!" said the Vice-Consul; "we must have nothing more about breaking bones: to knock down one fellow was quite enough. But I am very much obliged to you, Oliver. I can't make a stranger of you after this. My little girl is all I have in the world, and whoever is good to her is good to me. If you are going to stay in Leghorn, I hope you'll let me be of

some use to you; but I don't suppose that's very likely. Meantime, Rita, don't you think we had better go to lunch?"

What welcome words these were to Harry! He was excited and pleased by the adventure altogether; his head was a little turned by the enthusiasm of gratitude with which he was received, and the atmosphere around this young creature, who was a kind of mystic half revelation to him. He had not yet made out her face quite distinctly, and yet he was admitted to all the privileges of friendship: the strange sensation intoxicated him. But yet when her father spoke of lunch, all that went out of his head. Consider that he had eaten nothing but about half a yard of tasteless bread that day! and it was one o'clock. But Harry was not without manners; though the pangs of appetite made him faint, he got up politely and made a pretence at taking leave. Needless to say that the Vice-Consul was above taking advantage of his position, "No, no, no; we are going to keep you to luncheon," he said, with a *bonhomie* which was irresistible. Harry thought him the most delightful person in the world, only a little less delightful than the other unknown being who made him feel tremu-

lous and abashed, though so happy. The dining-room was lighted from the shady side of the courtyard, and there was accordingly light enough to see by. The meal was not a foreign breakfast, but an English luncheon of a substantial kind, and it is safe to say that Harry had never been so happy in his life as when he had taken off the first fierce edge of appetite, and had begun to be able to enjoy the novelty and yet the familiarity of this unexpected scene. Mr. Bonamy (which was the name of the Vice-Consul) without laying aside the dignity as of a benevolent prince which was so remarkable in him, showed all the condescension of a thoroughly amiable potentate; and Rita was——Rita was something of which Harry had no previous conception. She was about sixteen—no more. Her face was the face of a child, but lighted up by two beautiful large eyes which she had got from her Italian mother. She knew, or seemed to know, everything her father knew, and was used to be talked to about all that happened. If it were not Joan putting in her word occasionally in a long discussion when her interference was seldom received but with either blame or contempt, Harry had never been accustomed to women who took any

share in the conversation going on; and to hear this child talk bewildered him. She had a slight girlish figure, a small face almost without colour, the faint sweet flesh tints of which were thrown up in the most delicate distinctness by the white of her dress. She seemed all spirit, all life, a creature made of air and sunshine rather than flesh and blood to Harry. And about himself there was so much flesh and blood! He listened to the conversation rather than joined in it, feeling himself an admiring audience rather than a partaker in their talk. One thing only he felt moved to say, and that was about his own appetite, which he feared they would think preposterous. "I feel more like a wolf than a man," he said. "I hope you won't think I'm always like this. I never was abroad before, and I don't know the ways. And I had no breakfast but some of their queer bread. This bread is delightful," Harry said, with enthusiasm. The father and the daughter were delighted with him, appetite and all.

"I am so glad you never were abroad before," said Rita; "now one sees exactly what England is like. Oh, yes, papa, you need not laugh. I see the English green, and the trees waving, and

the winds blowing, all in Mr. Oliver's face. And there is a little sound of the sea, and a shadow of hills—not big mountains, but nice, kind hills with sheep-bells tinkling ——"

"We have not many sheep-bells, Miss Bonamy, in my country," said Harry; "the hills are more grey than green, and there is a great deal of fog in the winter, and east wind, and rain——"

"Oh, don't tell me about the bad things, tell me about what is pleasant," said Rita. "The east wind is not so bad as the scirocco, and the rain is delightful. I know all about that. As for the fog, the painters say it is more picturesque than anything. They say there is always a soft delicious sort of haze, and you never see things sharp cut out against the sky as they look here."

"Have you never been in England?" Harry said, with a little surprise; and then he saw that a shade, a sort of cloud, come over the lively table, and the two animated faces. Rita shook her head, and then began to talk quickly to him about the neighbourhood, and all he would have to see. Harry had protested to his humble friends that he wanted to see nothing but the shipping, but he did not repeat this sentiment here. He learned in a moment that to be fond of pictures was a

necessity, and that there were certain things which every Englishman in Italy had come expressly to worship. Rita's opinion "of course" convinced him in a moment. He never made the slightest stand against it. Henceforward he knew what was expected of him. When she went out of the room waving her fingers to him in sign of good-bye, Harry suddenly became quite grave, and felt all at once as if the light had gone out of the sky. And there was more than sentiment in this feeling; for now he found himself face to face with the Vice-Consul, and it was very evident that, so much having passed between them, something more would now have to be said. Mr. Bonamy offered the young man a cigar, and, lighting his own, leant back in his chair, and evidently awaited some further disclosures of his mind and purpose.

"You are thinking of staying in Leghorn," he said.

"I am thinking," said Harry, feeling his colour rise, "of trying to get employment, if I can; a situation of some kind."

"Employment!" said the Vice-Consul. It was impossible to deny that he was disappointed. His voice had an accent which there was no mis-

taking. Harry had not much refinement or education, but he had an air which would have been perfectly consistent with the rank of a young squire, an English country gentleman of simple mind, and no great amount of culture, travelling for his pleasure, and perhaps with some vague idea of improvement. Mr. Bonamy, who had received him so cordially, and who had been pleased to be under an obligation to a young fellow of attractive appearance and pleasant manners, was more cast down by this intimation than might have been thought possible. Not a young squire: nobody in particular: a penniless youth seeking employment. Such visitors were not rare, but they seldom penetrated into the carefully-guarded interior of the Vice-Consul's house.

Harry felt very much abashed. He was sensible of the downfall. How he longed to produce the glories of the Joscelyns, and convince his hearer that, if he was humble now, his family had once sat with princes! Perhaps Mr. Bonamy might not have been so impressed by these ancestors as Harry thought; but as it was they looked at each other blankly, mutually feeling that a great fall had taken place. Harry smiled

in that rigid way which is popularly called smiling at the wrong side of the face.

"Yes," he said, "employment. I don't know that I am very good for anything: but I have some little acquaintance with—business."

This was worse and worse. Had he been possessed of a knowledge of law business, or military drill, or anything likely to be of no real use to him, the situation might have improved. But business! book-keeping, and that sort of thing! no doubt he was a mere clerk after all.

"You have recommendations, I suppose, from your last employers," Mr. Bonamy said, coldly. "I shall be glad if I can be of any use, but——"

"To tell the truth," said Harry—he was seized with an outburst of frankness, feeling a kind of desperation seize him at sight of this cold withdrawal of the sudden friendship which had made him so happy for the moment—"to tell the truth I have no recommendations. If anyone will be kind to me they must take me at my own word. All I have got to say for myself is that I have quarrelled with my family. I cannot enter into the question now. I have done it, and that is all I can say; and here I am, and I must get employment. I am not going to push myself into your

acquaintance, Sir. It was an accident, nothing more than an accident; and probably you thought me a person of more importance——"

"Importance or not has nothing to do with it," said the Vice-Consul; and again his countenance softened. A young man who has quarrelled with his family is no doubt a person to be lectured and reproved, and brought back to a sense of duty, but all the same he is quite different from a commonplace clerk seeking a situation. Harry did not intend to throw any halo of distinction over his own humble person, but he did it unawares. Mr. Bonamy's countenance gradually cleared. "My dear young fellow," he said, "I daresay you are impulsive and hot-headed, like so many other young men. As being under obligations to you, I may allow myself to give you good advice. No advantage ever springs from family quarrels. My advice to you is, make it up."

"Not for anything in the world," said Harry, hotly. "I have been treated—I can't say how I have been treated. I will neither make it up, nor will I go near them, or have any communication with them, till I am altogether independent of them, and have worked out a position for myself!"

"You must not be so violent," said the Vice-Consul. "Come, come, let me act the part of a real friend. Let me write."

"Never!" said Harry, getting up to his feet. "I am very sorry, Sir, to have troubled you with my affairs."

"That is nonsence," said Mr. Bonamy. "Sit down, sit down, and let us talk it over. You have been hot-headed, I don't doubt. What is it now? tell me. Some foolish falling in love. You must want to marry somebody they don't approve."

Harry smiled in spite of himself. "I am no more in love than you are, Sir," he said.

"That might be a dangerous affirmation," said the Vice-Consul, shaking his head, with a smile which was somewhat melancholy; "but I understand what you mean. Then was it money? You have been foolish and got into debt?"

"It was a little about money; but not because I had got into debt—and that was the least of it," Harry said. "You must pardon me, Sir; but indeed I cannot tell you: it is a complicated business; and I can't depart from what I have said. I will never go home, never make it up till I have made my own fortune. But if you will

believe me," he said earnestly, with a flush of hot colour, "the fault was not mine. I have nothing to conceal on my side."

"Then why conceal it?" said the Vice-Consul. "I cannot act for you unless I have full information; but if you will trust me with your story ——"

"I would trust you sooner than anyone I know; but I have promised that I will never say a word on the subject," said Harry, with all the obstinacy of all the Joscelyns in his face," until—I am independent, as I have said." He rose up a second time, all flushed and excited. "I am going to try my luck at Leghorn," he said. "I am much obliged to you, Sir, for your kindness. I have felt myself again since I have been here; but now I will not trouble you any more." He held out his hand. He was a handsome young fellow, tall and strong, with the sunburnt countenance and well-developed limbs, and curling, fair locks, which are everywhere identified with a young Englishman. He was not at all like a mere clerk in an office; he was like a son of the fields and woods, one of those whose training has been of the kind most prized and appreciated by all Englishmen—an open-air youth;

a rider, rower, swimmer, cricketer—brought up in that way which involves leisure and space, and all the appliances of country-life. Mr. Bonamy saw all this in Harry's vigorous form and movements. He felt sure that he could not be a nobody. And after all, except that of being a nobody, there is in youth no unpardonable sin.

"Don't be in such a hurry. Sit down again, the office does not open for another half-hour: and let me hear what there is to be done for you," he said.

This was a question more embarrassing than the Vice-Consul supposed, for after all there did not seem much that Harry could do. He confessed that he had almost forgotten what he knew at school, and he had never learned any modern languages, and could speak no tongue but his own. He had a little experience in business, he said; but this was the only knowledge he could lay claim to. The Vice-Counsel did not know what to make of him; but as he had started with the distinct hypothesis that Harry was a squire's son, it was not very difficult to fit in the facts to his foregone conclusion. Many a young gentleman forgot all his school learning by the time he was

twenty. The difficult thing was that knowledge of business which at first Harry had been strongly disposed to put forward as the only faculty which he knew himself to be possessed of. How had he acquired that? Mr. Bonamy ended by deciding that he must have quarrelled with his family some time before, and that his acquaintance with business had been the fruit of some attempt made in England to maintain himself before he came here. Thus, without any intention on Harry's part, he managed to deceive his first influential friend. He neither meant to do it, nor was he aware he had done it; but still this was how things fell out. The conclusion of the interview was that Mr. Bonamy engaged Harry to come back to him next day, when he would have thought the whole matter over, and know what to say. They parted with great friendship and cordiality, Mr. Bonamy having entirely come round again to his own theory in respect to the young man who had been so serviceable to his daughter. Everything seemed to prove this, Harry's very ignorance among the rest. "In these days every poor lad is more or less educated; a gentleman's son, who has something else to look to than competitive examination, he is the only one that

escapes that sort of thing," the Vice-Consul wisely said. Harry, on his part, went off to his hotel with greatly exhilarated feelings. He had done nothing, he said to himself, but make friends since ever he came to Leghorn. To be sure in the light of the Vice-Consul's friendship he felt that Paolo was (as he had always felt) somewhat beneath his pretensions.. But still the poor fellow had been very kind. As he came out by the private door of the Consul's house, he saw Paolo at a little distance waiting till the public door of the Consulate should be open. He saw Harry and rushed at him, beckoning violently.

"Komm 'ere, komm 'ere; this is the place," he said. "Komm along, I will introduce you, I will respond for you; now is the time to find the Vice-Consul amiable. He is always amiable when he has well breakfasted." He seized Harry by the arm, and tried to drag him back to the Consulate with an anxious desire to serve his friend which merited a better return. Harry shook himself free of the little man with good-natured impatience.

"I've just come from the Vice-Consul," he said with dignity, "we're the best of friends. I've been able to be of use to him, and he is going to

be of use to me. Many thanks to you, Paolo, all the same; but I've been lunching there, and —and I've done my business. To-morrow I am to go again," Harry said, unconsciously holding his head high. Paolo gazed at him with eyes and mouth that were like round O's of wonder. He was much crestfallen in his honest endeavours to be of service. But he soon recovered his spirits.

"Bravo!" he said three times over, each time more satisfied than the other Then he rose to a "Bravissimo," with a smile that lighted up his olive face. "It would have made me pleasure to be of use to you, Ser Isaack mio. I would have responded, I would have taken it all upon me—what you call caution. But you are a true English, like the Vice-Consul himself, and it is just that you should understand each other. I am not disappointed—I am happy, very much happy that you have not any need of me," little Paolo said, smiling, but with tears in his eyes.

CHAPTER V.

PAOLO.

PAOLO came back from his labours in the evening, very curious to know all about Harry's interview with the Consul, and the origin and the result of the acquaintance between them. But Harry was prudent. He was prudent without any motive, from personal pride, rather than from any consideration for the credit of Miss Bonamy, which he did not think to be in the least involved. The women with whom Harry was acquainted were not of a kind who would have been afraid to go anywhere in the evening, and it did not occur to him that the reputation, even of a girl, in Italy would be jeopardized by such an innocent benevolence as that of going to visit a sick neighbour at night. Therefore it was simply

pride and English reserve, not any notion of prudence on Rita's account, that kept him silent on the subject. Paolo had a very different conception of the affair. He was very anxious to find out what had been the immediate effect upon Harry's mind of the visit to the Consul's house.

"There is a—young ladi there," he said, watching Harry's face. "You see perhaps, yes? a young ladi, the daughter of the Signor."

"Oh, yes, I saw Miss Bonamy," Harry said.

"And you nevare—see her before?" This Paolo asked with a gleam of mischief in his dark eyes, and the air of a man who knew a great deal more than he said.

"Oh yes, I have met her before," said Harry lightly. "They were quite old friends. I did not in the least expect to meet people so like old friends here."

Paolo was bewildered by this speech, and did not know what to think.

"Ah," he said in a tone of disappointment. "You know them in your country? what you call at 'ome? But," he added with a little triumph, "there you could not meet Signorina Rita, because she is never to go to England; her mother die in England, her mother was the daughter of an English

and Italian, like me for example; but she die in England when she go, all young, when the Signorina was a bébé. The Signor Vice-Consul was mad—Si! mad, there is no other word. It was a long time that it was thought he die too—but no, he live, he go on living; but the Signorina Rita never go to England, that is finished, that is fixed, nothing will change it. It could not be that you meet her there."

"Do you know Miss Bonamy very well," said Harry with a little offence, "that you call her by her Christian name?"

"I say Signorina Rita, it is our custom. If she were an old, I should say Sora Rita; and the Vice-Consul he is Ser Giovanni, that is our custom. Ser Isaack you, Ser Paolo me—but not for you, amico. When you say Paul-o, that pleases me," and Paolo laughed, showing his teeth, which were very white and even. He added, after a moment, with a sudden moistening of his brilliant eyes, "But what displeases me, after becoming amici, as we are, is not to be able to serve you. I picture to myself that I will do something; not moche, but yet something. I will stand up and say, 'I take him upon myself. He is without papers, but I take him upon myself—me.' Now

I am without use. It is no matter to you to have Paolo Thomp-sone for your friend. The Vice-Consul is moche bettare—he is grand personage; he has power, not only the heart, like me."

"But, Paul-o," said Harry, anxious to comfort him, and half touched, half amused by his distress, "but for you I should never have gone near the Vice-Consul: you put it into my head. But for you," he added, with a laugh, putting his hand lightly on Paolo's shoulder, "I think I should have turned tail altogether, and wandered off I don't know where."

Paolo's face shone with delight. He would have rushed into Harry's arms had that been practicable, and thrown himself upon his breast. But Harry, laughing, kept his friend at arm's length. To have kissed, or to have suffered himself to be kissed by, any man, seemed to him the height of ridicule. Paolo, baffled in this impulse, sat down and looked at him with radiant eyes. "Now I know that we are amici," he said. "Aspetto! There is still a way I can serve you. I well teach you to speak the Italian. You shall know it so well that they shall say, Ecco un Italiano. Me, I have been to school in Sienna. I know the real Toscano—the best Italian. We

shall begin this moment. That pleases to you, Ser Isaack?" asked Paolo, tenderly, looking with humble and deprecating eagerness into his face.

"You must learn to speak English better," Harry said, with some condescension. "I told you before you must not not say an English, but an Englishman, and to say an old is nonsense — it should be an old woman, or an old man, whichever it may be."

"Yes, yes," cried Paolo, "that is alright, that is understood. You correct me when I say what is not just, and I teach you."

"Come out now for a walk," Harry said.

Paolo jumped up alert and delighted. It is true that it glanced across the mind of the young Englishman that perhaps it was beneath the dignity of a man who was a friend of the Vice-Consul's, and thus, as it were, a member of the best society, to walk about with Paolo hanging on to his arm. But, though Harry was full of youthful conceits and the prejudices of an ignorant Englishman, he yet had a heart in his capacious bosom, and Paolo's devotion had been so great as to touch that heart. He said to himself, with a little effusion, that he never would turn his back upon a little fellow who had been so anxious to help him.

It might be that it was presumption on the part of the little fellow to think himself capable of serving Harry, but still it was well meant, and his undisguised admiration showed a most just and well-judging spirit. Nothing, he said to himself, would induce him to turn his back upon Paolo, his first friend. Antonio had given his whole attention to the two during the course of dinner. He had loitered behind them when he was not actively pressing upon them all the choicest morsels, to the despair of various less interesting guests who could not catch his eye, and who shouted and stamped in vain. He kept shifting from one foot to another in the restlessness of pure pleasure as he caught now and then a word of the conversation between them, and rubbed his hands with delight in the consciousness of being able to understand it. Now and then he would punch a fat Italian, with whom he was familiar, in the shoulder, and call his attention. "Ecco il giovane Inglese," he would say, though Harry was doing nothing more important than eating his dinner. Antonio had got his five francs for a very short day, for naturally the time passed in the Consul's had given him no trouble except that of waiting, and what was still more to the purpose than the

five francs was the importance of having such a witness to his power of English-speaking as this new guest, who could arrange nothing for himself without his (Antonio's) help. He disregarded even the call of the chief butler, so absorbed was he in his favourite stranger.

"Do you wish the young Inglese to starve," he asked, indignantly, in his native language, "when you know the Inglesi are the best customers the padrone has, and always send millions more? Do you propose to yourself that he should have nothing to eat, this young one that is no doubt made of gold; and how can he have anything to eat if I am not there to serve him?"

Thus he kept behind Harry's chair with a countenance full of delighted interest. Now and then he would put in a word. "Ze signori will do much better to go to ze opera to-night," he said. "Zey will hear La Catalina, who is ze first in Italy. It is ze 'Barbiere,' Ser Paolo, which gives itself to-night."

Paolo looked up appealingly into his friend's face, but Harry brushed the suggestion away with a true British argument. "Oh, for heaven's sake," he cried, "don't let us go and box ourselves up in a hot theatre on such a night."

Paolo sighed, but obeyed. He repeated the sentiment in a superior tone to Antonio, who was anxiously serving them with Cigare Scelte, arranged in different kinds upon a wooden tray. "A hot theatre, Antonio mio! one does not go there in a so warm evening. That goes well with the winter, when it is cold; but in summer, we young have need of moche air and the great world to keep us comfort-able. When you know more of real English you will learn what they love."

Antonio accepted this decision of his superiors with much respect, and laid it up in his memory, to be produced on his own account when it might accord with his pretensions as an Anglomane and person of high sentiment to produce it. But in the meantime he could not but launch a little criticism to the others who overheard this dignified rebuke. "That little Paolino," he said, as they went out, "to give himself the air of a rich Inglese! He is neither one thing nor another. He is no more than an abozzo—a sketch of an Inglese," Antonio cried. He had been in an artist's studio in his day. "Me, I understand them, al fondo," he added, beating his breast.

Little Paolo had no notion that he was being called an abozzo. He sallied forth, lighting his

cigar, thrusting his arm through Harry's with the greatest delight and pride.

Next day, at the hour appointed, Harry presented himself at the Vice-Consul's office, and was received with the same cordiality. Mr. Bonamy had "made inquiries," but, as nobody in Leghorn knew anything about Harry, there was not much information to be procured. Neither did the captain of the steamer in which he had arrived know anything about him except that he was a passenger in the second cabin; although he looked quite superior to the second cabin. "I set him down as somebody's son in disgrace with his family," the captain said. This chimed in sufficiently well with Mr. Bonamy's observations. He met Harry after the first consultation with a grave face. "You know I know nothing about you, Mr. Oliver, he said, "except—and that is not much —what you have chosen to tell me."

"That is quite true, Sir," said Harry, growing serious too, and feeling his heart sink, "and I have no right to expect you to take my word even for that."

"Therefore," said the Vice-Consul, "(for you should never interrupt a man in the middle of a sentence), I have the more claim upon you to

treat me in an honourable way. If you had come with all your papers, as they say in this country, I should not have had the same right to put you on parole, as it were. If you know no reason why I shouldn't take you into my office, and trust you with the Queen's affairs, I mean to do so. But if there is anything that would make you a discredit to Her Majesty's Service——"

"There is nothing, Sir," said Harry, standing up. His face flushed, his nostril dilated, an impulse of almost fierce self-justification came upon him; but fortunately for him he was not used to defending himself, and he could not say another word.

"Then that is enough," said the Vice-Consul. "I take you on your own parole."

They were both silent for a minute or two after. It was not like a common engagement. Harry's heart was in his throat. What with surprise at this extraordinary good fortune, and the emotion called forth by a confidence in him which he could not help feeling to be as extraordinary, he was quite beyond his own control. If he had said anything he would have "made a fool of himself," so he said nothing, but sat still, almost disposed, like Paolo, to be tearful, which was the

most dreadful catastrophe he could think of. The good Vice-Consul was a little affected too.

"But I don't know a word of the language," at last Harry said.

"We have more to do with Englishmen than Italians," said Mr. Bonamy. "Perhaps the fellow whom you knocked down 'quietly,' as you told me, may come and make his complaint to you. Your knocking a man down quietly was the thing that tickled me. I wonder what was his opinion of it. You must learn the language of course, and some other things quite as important. You must find out all about the harbour by-laws and dues, and all that affects the shipping. These are things we have a great deal to do with. You must master them, that is the most important thing; and when you have been here for a little while you will find out other points. Do you know anyone from whom you can get lessons? But I suppose, as a matter of fact, you don't know anyone here."

Here Harry, finding his power of speech, told him of Paolo, with that half laugh of commentary which implies a certain slight of the friend to whom he had so much reason to be grateful. He felt that it was mean, but he

could not help it. How could he help implying a laugh at the droll little person who held by him so faithfully, yet was so entirely out of Harry's way? However, the Vice-Consul took Paolo quite seriously. He nodded his head with approval. "Nobody better—nobody better," he said. "I see you laugh at him; but he is as sound as a bell, that little fellow, and always rings true. That he is not quite your equal," Mr. Bonamy added, "does not matter a bit in the circumstances. I am glad that you have chanced so fortunately. To get hold by accident of such a genuine person as Paolo is quite a piece of luck. I rather think you must be a lucky person," he added, with a laugh

"Since I came to Leghorn," said Harry, fervently, "nothing could be more true than that."

"Yes, I think you must be lucky," said the Vice-Consul, "to hit upon a perfectly honest person as your first acquaintance, then making haste to get yourself into a row to have so good an excuse for it as my Rita, and then——"

"And then," said Harry, "to meet with such astonishing, such unlooked-for kindness, to fall on my feet in such a wonderful way."

"Well, perhaps," said Mr. Bonamy, not dis-

pleased, "we may say that was luck too; and one thing, Oliver," he added quickly, "it will be so much the better for you that employment in Her Majesty's Service is a disgrace to nobody; mind what I say. Of course, in the nature of events, you and your family will not be at daggers drawn for ever; and when you condescend to go back, or they find you out, and come to look for you——"

"Neither, neither will happen," cried Harry, shaking his head.

"We shall see; but if that day comes, there is nothing for them to find fault with. A Consulate is not like a merchant's office; anybody may serve Her Majesty. None of us, I hope, are too good for that."

"I assure you, Sir——" Harry cried, hastily.

"No, no, you need not assure me. I don't want to know anything; unless, indeed, your heart should be opened to tell me *everything*, which I should really be glad of. Well," he said, "come to-morrow morning and begin. Your friend, Paolo, will tell you about the hours: and I hope, Oliver, we shall always remain the best of friends," the Vice-Consul added, rising and holding out his hand. "I hope nothing will

happen to make me entertain a less opinion of you than I do now; that's understood. You shall have a card for Rita's evening at-home, and I hope you'll come and see us occasionally in a friendly way. Let us say next Sunday, perhaps? Sunday's a dreary day for a young man by himself. Come after church, and stay for the after noon; for the present, goodbye."

Harry took his hat and made his best bow. He was really quite tremulous with excitement, surprise, and pleasure. To be so speedily and so easily established was more good fortune than he could realize. When he was at the door Mr. Bonamy called him back.

"Oliver!" he cried, "one moment; I would not knock any more men down if I were you; however quietly it is done, it is a little risky, and Her Majesty's Service, you know——"

"You needn't fear, Sir; that's what Paul-o has been preaching to me all the time," Harry said.

Upon which the Vice-Consul laughed benignly.

"Paul-o, as you call him, is as good an adviser as you could have," he said.

"What should I call him but Paul-o?" Harry said to himself; and he went off with his head

in the air. Lucky! indeed he had been lucky; only the third day since his arrival and he had a situation and a sort of a home and friends; to make up to him for all the evil that had happened to him before, providence was taking special care of him now. Somehow this made Harry think of his mother, of whom, hitherto, his thoughts had been scarcely more kind than towards the others concerned; a little moisture crept unawares to his eyes. "She'll have been praying," he said to himself; and suddenly he seemed to see her, as he had seen her so often, wringing her thin worn hands, her lips trembling with words that were inaudible. He thought—it would be hard to trace the exact connection of ideas, but there was one—that he would go in to the first church in which there seemed to be service going on, on his way back to the inn. It would not have occurred to him to go into a church where there was no service, but when he heard the tinkle of a bell, and saw one or two people creeping up and down the broad stone steps, he went in, though with a little opposition in his mind, as well as a certain craving for sympathy and utterance. But when he went in, Harry saw no signs of public worship. The

tinkle of the bell was coming from an altar in a side chapel, where a great many candles were burning. In the body of the church some people were seated quietly, others kneeling on the low rush-bottomed chairs. He stood and gazed for a little with mingled feelings, with a great opposition in his mind to the Papist ritual and ceremonies (of which he saw nothing, and which, to tell the truth, he had never seen, and knew nothing whatever about); and disapproval of the people who were in the church for, as he thought, no purpose—mingled with a curious sense of the grateful calm and quietness and seclusion of the place, the serene coolness and breadth of its lofty roofs and silent space. This stole upon him, he could not tell how. He would not have knelt down, as the few people about were doing, to save his life: it would have seemed to him like the famous bowing down in the house of Rimmon, for the North was very Protestant in those days, and sympathy with Rome was very rare. He would not even say a distinct prayer in his heart, which would have seemed like yielding to temptation. But, as he stood, there rose in him an unwilling devotion, and the thanks that had been in his mind were perhaps not the less given that

they were arbitrarily refused utterance. For Harry's prejudices were a part of his training, not anything that originated in himself. When he went away the moisture came again into the corners of his eyes. His mother was as Protestant, more Protestant, than himself. She would have thought it wrong to go into "a Catholic chapel." She would scarcely have been able to believe in the existence of a country not given over to all evil, in which a Popish place of worship was not a Catholic chapel, but an established church. Oh, the poor people! what benighted darkness they must be in! she would have said, in her ignorance. But somehow, Harry could not have told how, he felt as if he had approached his mother in that foreign place. The silent church, with the silent people in it praying, made him think of her as he had seen her, with her lips moving and her hands clasped together. Often again he stole in for a moment to renew that sentiment, which was so soft and pathetic. He held out against his mother all the time obstinately, though he knew he was condemning her to great suffering—and he entirely disapproved of the church; but for all that the two had some subtle resemblance, a

union of two things he was hostile to, which went to his heart.

Paolo came to dinner in great triumph. He had placed a flower in his button-hole and put on a brilliant new tie in honour of the great event, and fairly threw himself upon his amico and kissed him with enthusiasm before Harry could get out of this extremely embarrassing position. Never young girl blushed more uncomfortably than the young man did as he drew himself out of his enthusiastic friend's embrace.

"What have I done to you that you make no response?" Paolo said, almost weeping over this repulse.

"Hold your tongue, for goodness' sake! Men don't kiss each other in England. Whatever you do, don't be ridiculous," Harry cried.

Poor little Paolo was wounded to the heart.

"I am an English myself," he said. "Yes, yes, an English*man*, if you will; I have not the courage to remember. I am a true English-man; but it is cruel all the same. Should I then take no notice? when it is the wish most dear of my heart that will be fulfilled? Always I have said to myself—if the Santissima Virgin would send a real English-man, not one that is what you call

90885

'alf-and-'alf, like me. And when it is done, and my amico whom I have chosen turns out to be he whom I have so much desired, am not I to show a little that I am glad? I am 'appy that I am an Italian," said Paolo, with indignation, "if it is so."

And there was a little suspension of intercourse between them. But this did not last; Paolo was too good-humoured and too tender-hearted to stand out; he begged his friend's pardon in less than five minutes. Harry, whose mind moved more slowly, had not had time to realize that he had been unkind when this reversal of the position took place. Paolo did all but weep in his penitence.

"I am good-for-nothing," he said, "I am without sentiment, I have no delicacy nor education. Who can say why you were so magnanimous as to choose me, me! for your amico? and when you show the true dignity of an English, me I am so without good-breeding, so common, so devoid of sentiment, that I become angry! but if you will only forgive me, forgive me this once——!"

"It is I who am a brute," said Harry, penitent in his turn. But Paolo protested with tears in

his eyes, and would have thrown himself at his friend's feet, or on his neck again, in the excitement of the reconciliation. And though he was usually very thrifty, calculating every centissimo, he ordered a bottle of *champagne frappé* to celebrate the day. Nothing would prevail upon him to countermand this order.

"It is a festa," cried the little man, "and it is a reparation: and we will drink to our eternal friendship." Paolo did not know that he was guilty of plagiarism; he was heroically in earnest, and drank his wine, which Antonio brought with great pride and many grins, triumphantly in its pail, setting it on the table before them, and watching its consumption with the most amiable interest. "And here is for a bicchierino," Paolo said, bestowing a small coin upon Antonio with much grandeur, "drink thou also the health ot Ser Isaack, who is my amico," and he held out his foaming glass to touch that of his friend.

Paolo's head was turned altogether by these unusual potations; and Harry's first office was to see his friend safe home and deliver him from all the dangers of the streets, on this too triumphant night.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OFFICE.

HARRY entered upon his work next day, and was in a few hours so entirely bewildered by the novel character of the questions addressed to him, and the information he was supposed to possess, that he went to the Vice-Consul in the evening in dismay. "I don't know a thing," he said; "I never knew before what an ignorant beast I was. It would only be taking advantage of you if I were to stay."

This hasty alarm and anxious honesty of purpose made Mr. Bonamy more and more certain that he had judged rightly. "Don't give in in such a hurry," he said, "you can't be expected to know things of that sort without learning. They are not part of a gentleman's education. You

must get your friend Paolo to take you in hand. He is a perfect mine of information. I have often to refer to him myself. Though he is not in a very high position, he knows more about these special matters than all the rest of us put together."

And thus balm was diffused over Harry's sore spirit. But he could not help asking himself why the inequalities and injustices of this world should be so marked in respect to Paolo. Why should he not be in a very high position so far as the Vice-Consul's office was concerned? He, Harry, who was an ignoramus and knew nothing, was to have higher pay and far more consideration than the other, who was a mine of knowledge. It was true that Harry's personal sense of superiority to Paolo was noways weakened—but yet he felt the injustice. He had not been used to enter into such questions, yet he could not but see that to bolster up the ignorance of a well-looking Englishman, by the knowledge of a little oddity of an Italian was somewhat hard so far as the Italian was concerned. It was, accordingly, with a deprecating tone that he spoke to Paolo at dinner. It even moved him to a little insincerity. What he had said to the Vice-Consul in all good

faith, and much dismay, he repeated to Paolo, not meaning it at all. "I don't know a thing," he said, "not one question could I answer. I never knew I was so ignorant. It is very nice to be settled and have Mr. Bonamy for my chief, and you, Paolo, to help me through: but a fellow must be honest—and when the beggars come and ask me things, I can't go on pretending to know."

"You shall not pretend to know, Isaack mio," cried Paolo, with a beaming countenance. "Now is just come the moment which I was looking for, which show that it is good to have a friend. How much does it matter whether it is you that have it or I that have it? Listen then to me. You think Paolo Thomp-sone a little nobody, and it is true; but listen—listen to me. It is not to talk big or to brag that is necessary. *I* know."

"I am sure of that, Paolo," said Harry, languidly, and with the look of dejection which was half acting, though he did not intend it. "The Vice-Consul said so. He told me you were a mine of knowledge. But why should I pick your brains? Why should I mount up upon you and stand upon your shoulders, and get all the credit of it? That is not just any more than

the other. I oughtn't to take everything from you."

Paolo could scarcely keep still upon his chair in his delight and satisfaction. His face glowed and shone with happiness. "Are not you my friend?" he cried; "all that which is to Paolo is to you, Ser Isaack. It is my pride. We will begin to-night. It is better than to go out to the Café to sit and sip Rosolio—to be idle like the others—moche bettare. You shall come to my room, or I will go to yours—and then the books, and to write the exercises, and to stoody. Yes, yes—I know. I have been here all my life—I know moche, almost everything. Then we commence to-night."

"But, Paolo, how am I to accept all that from you? A week ago you did not know me, and now you are going to sacrifice all your spare time and your pleasure to me; that is not just, as you say. You must let me at least," said Harry, faltering, and, with a glimmering insight which was quite new to him, watching his friend's countenance, "you must let me at least—consider you as—my master, you know; and we must settle—now don't be angry—a price."

Paolo did not say a word; he turned his face

away from his friend and pretended to go on eating his dinner. There was no need for words to show how deeply wounded he was. He turned his shoulder to Harry, and called the smiling Antonio to the other side.

"Take it away! take it away!" he said in English, "it choke me!" and he pushed his plate from him.

"Oh! Signor Paolo! Pertanto é buonissimo; don't cry, Ser Paolo," cried the anxious waiter. "These Inglesi, they are brutes; they have no sentiment; they give pain without knowing it. Pertanto, you must not weep."

"That imports me nothing," said Paolo, feebly. "It is again an illusion, my good Antonio; but I cannot weep much, for it is too deep."

"What are you two talking about? when you know I don't understand your confounded Italian!" cried Harry, at his wit's end. "What's the matter? what have I done now? you will drive a poor beggar out of his senses! Good Lord! you're not a woman, that you should cry for what a fellow says. I don't know what you mean by your sentiment and all that; I want to be honest, and not to take advantage of a good hearted duffer because he is my friend."

Paolo turned round with the tears still in his eyes.

"You call me duffere," he said quickly; "beggare I understand, but duffere I never heard."

"It means," said Harry, drawing on his imagination, "the best-hearted, silly kind fellow in the world, always going out of his way to help somebody, holding out his hand to a suspicious beast the moment he lands in a strange place, never giving him up though he behaves like a brute, giving everything like an idiot, but flaring up if you want to give him anything in return."

"Not that, not that," said Paolo, laying his hand upon his friend's arm. "I give you my lofe, and I wait for your lofe in return. If there is a thing you want I take it upon myself. Siamo amici! is there any more to say? I know nothing; all is in that. If it is true that I am your amico, then you are a beggare, you are a beast, you are all bad," said Paolo, with flashing eyes, "to be so base as to offer to pay me—money. Ah! che! che! there is nothing too bad, nothing too dreadful to say. Inglese brutale! false amico——!" Here he stopped all at once, and gazed piteously into Harry's

face. "Forgive me, forgive me, my friend!" he cried.

This all happened at dinner, at the *table-d'hôte*, which fortunately was not very full that day. There was nobody sitting opposite, which was a great relief to Harry's mind; but he could see from the end of the table the cynical Englishman, who had never taken any notice of him, giving an amused glance now and then at the group of friends—Paolo shedding tears into his plate, Antonio, with a face full of sympathy, tenderly removing it, essaying to console the sufferer. This was a greater trial to Harry's temper than even the sentiment of Paolo. He shot an answering glance of defiance at his countryman, who had uever so much as given the help of a kind word to the stranger.

"Let's say no more about it, Paolo," he said, "you and I are quite different, you know. I daresay I am a brutal Englishman, but I can't help it. That's our nature. We don't think so much of a little thing as you do, and we abhor making a fuss. Perhaps you don't know what that means?"

"I will nevare make a fuss more. I will learn to be a duffere, and do as you do,"

said Paolo, in all the tenderness of reconciliation.

Harry looked at him something as Joan looked at his mother. He had too good a heart to despise his little friend, and he did not understand him; but this sentiment was extremely inconvenient and very troublesome—on that point there could be no doubt.

However, later in the evening, Paolo, who had inherited all the Italian thrift, gave his friend some very sensible advice. Instead of going to the Café, they went to Paolo's *appartamento*, which was on the highest floor of a high house in one of the narrow streets. Though he called it an *appartamento* it was a single room, with an odd little closet in the shape of a kitchen, and offices attached to it. The room itself was somewhat low in the roof, being so high up, but had three or four windows, and a little balcony suspended over the street, into which it made Harry dizzy to look down as into an Alpine ravine. The floor was of tiles, the walls white, with a pattern in distemper, very graceful and flowing, round the top and bottom. The bed was a very tiny and bare article, put away in a corner. In another corner stood a table. A few

chairs, and an old, very straight-backed settee, with two arms, in old gilding and brocade, stood against the wall. There was a tall, brass *lucerna*, the lamp common throughout Italy, with its little bundle of snuffers and extinguisher and scissors to trim the wick, hanging from it by a chain, and a few books on a shelf. Nothing could be more bare. There was a small rug by the bedside, but no other covering for the bare area of tiles which was the chief feature in the room. Paolo had a little picture of the Madonna, a bad copy of that which is called the Madonna del Granduca, and a basin for holy water over his bed, which was covered with a red and blue cotton coverlet. Everything about showed the same bareness and absence both of comfort and ornament. But Paolo regarded his *appartamento* with eyes full of pleasure. He saw nothing wanting in it. It housed him sufficiently of nights, and was cool and pleasant in the summer mornings, when he rose, as most Italians do, in the early daylight, to get through all the private work he might happen to have. He looked round upon it with a gentle complaisance. Some old prints, and one or two copies of famous pictures, hung on the walls. In the best light was an old painting of a gloomy

and uncertain aspect, which Paolo believed to be a Margheritone. It might have been anything. He was very proud of it. "Ecco!" he said, when they went in, "my old master. He is a little dark, but when you study him you will find much in him. He is of the *trecento*—very early—very early. The painter have seen the blessed father, San Francesco; that indicates how old it must be."

Harry did not make any reply to this. For his part he liked things better for being new. The dark old picture had no charm for him at all, and he thought the *appartamento* rather worse as being larger than his own little room at the hotel, which had hitherto seemed to him the last example of bareness and dreariness. "A horrid little hole," more adapted for a dog than a man.

"I'll tell you one other thing," said Paolo, taking him affectionately by the shoulders before they sat down by the table; "if you will make economies, and do well, Isaack mio, you will not live always in the hotel. Me I dine there; it is the best thing to do; but live all the time—oh no! It is only for Englishmen to be so extravagant like that."

"That is what I have been thinking," said

Harry, "if I could get some nice rooms. You don't understand about Englishmen. Dining every day at an hotel is a thing nobody would think of in England. We have our dinner at home, or, if the landlady is not a good cook, then perhaps— But for my part I always preferred a beefsteak at home, even if it were not the most perfect cookery in the world. Dining at an hotel is a thing no one thinks of, except on a great occasion perhaps."

Paolo opened his eyes in surprise. "It is well," he said, "you are more prudent when you are in your own country. This is what you must do, Isaack, amico. You will first find an *appartamento*. It is not always that one is so fortunate as me. This is perfect—non é vero? It is all one could want. A bed—ecco! a table, the sof-fa that has come from a palazzo, even a little tabouret for the feet—everything. And then the balcone! When it makes warm in the summer, in July and Agosto, it is, oh! fresco, freschissimo so fresh and cool here! The first thing is an *appartamento*. But in every way I am too fortunate. As soon I dress in the morning, there is a caffè in face—you can see it if you look down—where I can have my coffee in a moment. No waiting as

when you go to a distance, but at the moment. They are about to send us now the coffee, amico, to clear our head. You will see how good it is. Then when the time come for the other breakfast —what you call lunch—there is a restaurant near the bureau. You have two very good dish, a dolce, and dessert; and very little to pay. I will lead you to-morrow to that place. And at last the dinner at the Leone. Figure to yourself so much comfort all in one day! And you see the journals for nothing, and hear what all the people say."

"Bless us all," said Harry, "in that way you are never at home."

"At 'ome! I am at 'ome everywere," the little Italian said; "all is friends; whatever goes on, everyone makes part of it to me. And when all is over you mount in your *appartamento*, you are tranquil, you light your lamp, you fume slowly your cigar on the balcone, you go to bed. And you make economies—great economies. Me even, that have not moche appointment, I become a little rich, what you call at my ease. And you, who will have moche more as me——"

"Why should I? You are a great deal mor use than I am," Harry said.

Paolo shook his head with a cheerful yet shrewd acceptance of the position. "Si, I am of more use," he said. "I am good for something; you, caro, not good for moche yet. But look at you and look at me. That expliques itself. That is the world's way—what you call the world's way. Come; the first thing is an *appartamento*. You think, perhaps, it is too high up here? But smell the good air," cried Paolo; "that is of itself refreshing—and the view! You will pay more scudi at the Leone in a week than for a month here. Ecco! here is the coffee, and though it is not yet quite dark, that amiable garzone, see, he has brought us a lamp."

Then there entered, with a knock at the door, the man from the caffè opposite, holding upon the points of three fingers a tray containing two heavy cups of white porcelain and the small coffee-pot, flanked by a plate of cakes, which Paolo's hospitality had added in honour of his friend. The waiter swung the lighted lamp in the other hand, holding it by the handle at the top, and in this way had come up five flights of stairs without spilling a drop of the coffee or jeopardizing the cups. He put the lamp on the table with a "Felicissima notte, Signori," looking upon the

two young men with looks as amiable as his wish. And, indeed, the wish has more reason in it at the beginning of the evening than at the end. Paolo was great as a host. He poured out his black coffee as if it had been the richest of drinks, and pressed upon Harry the odd little collection of cakes of every possible and impossible flavour. Some of them were excellent, but Harry thought he despised these innocent dainties. And he was not very fond of the black coffee: how much better he would have liked an English cup of tea! As he sat turning over the books which Paolo placed before him, and listened to his friend's explanations, gulping, with a great effort not to make a wry face, occasional mouthfuls of coffee, there seemed to flit before him a vision of his mother's parlour—the fragrant tea, the rich fresh cream, and herself, with that pale face which had not always seemed to him so attractive as it did now. Once, to tell the truth, Harry had thought his mother and sister heavy company, and in his heart had said that nothing could be more dull than the long evening in the parlour at home. Now that he was up here so near the sky in Paolo's *appartamento*, his ideas were different. The bare tiles underfoot, the wide, vacant space,

with the little bed in the corner, the dull old Margheritone staring him in the face, with a pair of round eyes looking out from its blackness—and all those knotty questions about the harbour dues to occupy him, made as great a contrast as could be conceived to the old curtains and carpets, and familiar walls, and cheerful fire, and the grey sweep of landscape showing from the windows, stretching far into the horizon. But he himself. Harry was very much the same, and in the one place as in the other he was unsatisfied. He thought it had been his surroundings that were to blame in the first instance, but now, after the excitement of all this new beginning, and the novelty of his new friends, and the new place, so unlike anything he had seen before, Paolo's *appartamento*, and the thought of settling down in another such, brought him back, with a sort of mental gasp, to himself. Was that all that was to come of it? It was scarcely worth while renouncing his name and his family, and all his past, in order to settle down in a room upon the fifth floor, among the chimney-pots, at Leghorn. While he was studying the dock regulations and harbour laws, his mind was busy about this other perplexing question. An *appartemento!* Was he never, he wondered,

with an impatience that was almost comic in the humiliation and depression it caused him, to have a sitting-room again? never to get a meal save in public, in the grim *sala* of the Leone, or in a gaudy restaurant with little marble tables; never even a cup of tea to himself in his own place, as an Englishman loves to have it; never to have a carpet under his feet, but cold tiles; and nothing in the world that looked like home? He kept all this to himself, and tried hard to grasp at the laws and regulations about the free port of Leghorn, and its etiquettes and its dues; but his inner soul was crossed all the time by impulses of ill-humour and disappointment which he could with difficulty restrain. It is always difficult, after a period of agitation and excitement, to settle down again and resume a steady routine; and Harry could not think of this kind of settling with anything but annoyance. The inn was not any better. His little sleeping-room there was not so good as Paolo's. In the *sala* there was always a sense of dinner combined with cigars; and in the other parts of the establishment the smell was of cigars impregnated with soup and divers odours of the kitchen. And these were the only places where he, with his English habits,

had a chance of sitting down! He sighed for his little parlour, with its Kidderminster carpet, and red moreen curtains, at Liverpool. It was a palace to the *appartamento*, or anything that seemed possible here.

They sat so late over their books that Paolo did not as usual insist upon accompanying Harry to the inn door. Paolo, for his part, had spent a very happy evening. He was learned in those bye-laws which so mystified Harry, and loved to enlarge upon them, and to impart information in any shape was a grateful exercise to him. He liked to do it, even when he was not—which he liked still better—doing a kindness to a friend; and he was proud of all the possessions which he had exhibited with such simple pleasure. It did not occur to him that his home, which he was so happy in, or the simple routine of life which he had set up for imitation, could fill any heart with dismay. He found himself perfectly comfortable in it, why should not his amico do the same? No doubt of the suitableness of this life to one as to another crossed his simple mind. He crunched the biscuits which Harry disdained, and drank the black coffee at which Harry made wry faces, and

was much pleased with himself, and very happy to think that he was setting before his friend the best way to walk in. He was scarcely so pleased with himself however when he was over-persuaded to allow Harry to go back to the hotel alone. "No, I will re-conduct you," he had said at first; but Harry laughed at the unnecessary ceremony. Paolo stood at the top of the great black well of a staircase and held the lucerna to light his friend downstairs, standing patiently with the heavy lamp dangling from his hand till he had heard the door close at the foot; and then he rushed to his balcony to watch lest Harry should turn the wrong way, ready to scream out to him if he did so. Even when he had made sure that his friend had turned to the right, and not to the left, Paolo still shook his head. "I should have re-conducted him," he said to himself. It was the only drawback to the perfect blessedness of the night.

It was a glorious night out of doors; the Italian moon was shining with a warmth and glory unknown to northern skies. Harry tried to think the moon was as fine in England, but he could not succeed in this; everything else was a great deal better in England, but there was something to be said for the climate here, one was forced to

admit—even though one might not admit anything more. Harry walked home (as he called it by force of nature) with much subdued irritation and despondency, consequent chiefly on the apparent impossibility of ever having a sitting-room, or any place it would be pleasant to sit in again. The inn, though he called it home, was not less obnoxious to him, and he asked himself, good heavens, was it possible he should never—— He had got as far as this when another picture suddenly rose up before him, and in a moment changed all his thoughts. It was of a dim room, cool and dark in the midst of the sunshine, with a whiteness of floating curtains about the windows, and tables covered with books, and a white figure in a corner, close upon the open dark space of a window closed by green persianis, through which the air was blowing softly. Ah! he said, drawing a long breath, there was a kind of paradise! That was very different from the *appartamento.* It was dark in his memory, as it had been when he had suddenly stepped into it out of the bright day with so much surprise that he could but dimly recollect the appearance of the place. He wondered how it would look when the persianis were open,

when the daylight got in, or at night when the lamps were lighted, when the place was fully inhabited?

Instinctively, without knowing what he was about, he turned into the street which led to the Consulate. His heart gave a jump against his breast when he saw that the persianis were all opened now, and that the lights in the room made it partially visible from the street. Evidently there was a party going on, and he felt a little pang of mortification to think that he had not been asked. There was a sound of music and a great deal of talk, talk that sounded exhilarating and delightful to Harry, though he would have felt himself a fish out of water had he been in the midst of the polyglot conversation that went on in the Consul's drawing-room. A white figure was seated near the window, faintly visible within the white curtains. He wondered if it was *hers*? He screwed his eyes together as if he had been short-sighted, to try to see a little better, but this was what he could not make out. The sudden glimpse of this little bright world from which he was shut out arrested Harry all at once in his discontented thoughts. Here was something which would make up for all deficiencies.

He stood for a long time under the windows, trying to hear the voices within, with no eavesdropping intentions, but only to console himself by the recollection that he had far more in common with the Vice-Consul's house and his society than with Paolo, though he was so good a friend. And then he stood opposite and watched, seeing figures vaguely glide across the room, figures which the white curtains, swaying softly in the air, kept indistinct. He could not distinguish her, he allowed to himself; sometimes he thought he had traced her, but only to find himself deceived. Some one in the background was playing the piano softly, though nobody paid much attention. Harry could not tear himself away from the window. That was life, he thought to himself; a man who had that house to go home to need never be dull; and then he remembered, with a glow of warm satisfaction and pleasure, that on Sunday, no further off, he was to go there. He turned after this with a resolute step, and went back to the hotel and his dreary little room, where he sat on his bed, gazing at the two little lights of the lucerna which had been given to him to light himself upstairs, for all the house was dark and at rest before he got back—and

thinking of that warm and cheerful scene. The lamp burned on steadily, the only light in all the big hotel, and Harry sat and gazed at it unwinking. Sunday afternoon! here was something to look forward to. And *that* was a house which was worth calling a home, which was not an *appartamento*. He thought life must have an altogether different complexion there.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BONAMYS.

MR. BONAMY, the Vice-Consul, was a man who ought to have filled a very different position. He ought to have been Consul-General and a person of importance. He had been long in the service, and he had done good work, and there was nothing against him. But there are some people who never will "get on," whatever may be the circumstances in their favour, just as there are some whom all the adverse circumstances in the world will not keep down. He was rash, as may have been seen by his reception of Harry, and he was one of those men upon whom experience has no power, who never learn—who having been deceived twenty times are just as ready to believe and be imposed upon the

twenty-first. His own goodness and rectitude were such that he had kept his position fairly, and his talent and fine faculties had not been without acknowledgment; but he had not "got on." There was another circumstance too which kept him in his present position. His history had been briefly told by Paolo, and was one which everybody knew. Eighteen years before he had married a beautiful girl, the daughter of an English merchant in Leghorn and his Italian wife. They had lived together for a year, and the little Rita had been born, when young Bonamy took his wife "home" with great delight and pride to exhibit her to his friends. She had scarcely touched English soil when she fell ill; it was an ungenial season, and the Italian girl was of a delicate constitution. The young husband, to whose mind danger or death never presented themselves as possible, always rash and venturesome, and ready to trust any gleam of sunshine, had been to blame in exposing her to the severities of the spring changes and the east winds, and the result was that he who had left Leghorn in the full zenith of happiness, returned a miserable man, alone, leaving his treasure in an English grave. For years after he had been so stunned

with his grief that he was capable of little but the routine of necessary work, and this period of deadly depression occurred just when there might have been hopes of promotion for him. He did not want any promotion. When he began to revive with the growth of his little girl, and to find in her a substitute for the young mother whom he had scarcely had time to know, it became a settled principle, almost a superstition in his mind, that Rita must never leave her native soil; she, at least, should never be exposed to those east winds and chilling mists of England. It became a part of the training he gave her, a part of the religion which everybody round was bound to. Whatever happened, Rita was not to leave Italy; the risks her mother had succumbed to were never to touch her. His living, his expectations, his life itself, were nothing in comparison with this. He was not a man of a strong mind, as may be easily perceived. There was but one thing which was utterly precious to him, and that was naturally the first thing in his thoughts. She throve here in the place where she had been born, just as her mother had done before her; and if she were removed she would die. This made him accept cheerfully the neglect of his

superiors; and he had made himself many friends in the place he had inhabited so long. The whole population knew him and his story, and sympathized, with the ready warmth of the race. It was known even to the dock-labourers, to the sailors in the port, that the Signorina Rita was never to go out of Italy. The people were all profoundly interested in her in consequence. It was a compliment to them, to their genial skies, and the health of the town, and the excellence of everything Italian, not to say Livornese, which went to their hearts; and the Vice-Consul and his daughter found themselves very happy in the place, which he would have left long ago had he been a more prosperous man.

This consoled him greatly for not getting on; indeed, he had lost ambition altogether, and given up all thought of advancement; he was satisfied with his life such as it was. It was a pleasant life enough, no press or hurry of business, no excessive responsibility, a friendly society round him, a number of people looking up to him, a kind of representative position which pleased his fancy. The shipping and the sea-captains who occupied so much of his time were not perhaps quite so delightful, but then there are

some drawbacks in every lot. He had a pleasant house, which he had gradually filled with furniture and pictures such as might have made a connoisseur's mouth water, and he had plenty of leisure time to enjoy the society of his daughter and of his friends. Unconsciously he had trained Rita to be his constant companion and confidant. He had not intended so to do; there had been no desire in him to withdraw her from younger companions, to keep her to himself; but when an intelligent child is made the companion of a mature mind, which is yet not too mature, but still capable of something of the indiscretion of youth, there is a charm in the intercourse which nothing else can equal. To a girl especially the attraction is great. Rita, almost before she had given up dolls and baby-houses, had begun to see the bigger world in glimpses through her father's eyes. She began to be aware of a universe full of people, full of humour and meaning, appearing behind like an inexhaustible background. And if she did not absolutely find out books by the same means, yet she made the discovery of most things that were beautiful and important in them. His opinions, his ideas represented a whole new heaven and new earth to her, before which the

nursery and its childish joys faded away. She had begun to know what he knew, to give an adoring echo to all his opinions, to understand his occupations, when other children are still resisting their first lessons, and resenting the interference of grown-up persons with all their pleasures. The Vice-Consul confided all his difficulties, when they arose, to her ears before she was twelve. She knew that the "F.O." was sometimes unreasonable, and that the shippers were troublesome, before she had quite mastered English, which was not her native tongue. Then there came a further development, when Rita no longer echoed her father's opinions, but had ideas of her own. This followed so quickly upon the first, and added such a delightful variety and animation to their intercourse, that the Vice-Consul fully believed she had been a critic in her cradle, and that all her lively views upon things in general had come to her direct by inspiration from above.

She was seventeen now, though she looked younger. For five years she had been everything that a grown-up companion can be, with something besides that no grown-up companion ever was. They were everything to each other. She reverenced him, and she laughed at him,

and patronized his ideas, and thought him the first of created beings. Nothing but a child could so mingle veneration and superiority, the freedom of an equal, the keenness of a critic, the enthusiasm of adoring love. There was not a thing he said which she could not pull to pieces, nor any of his actions that were not subject to her comments. "I would not have done that, papa, if I had been you," she would say; and yet she was of opinion that of all human creatures there was not one, on the whole, who came within a hundred miles of Her Britannic Majesty's Vice-Consul at Leghorn. This was the result of Rita's observations during the dozen years or so which she had unconsciously spent in accumulating materials upon which to form an opinion. And this was no small thing to say, for a clever child is the most close of observers, and far less likely to be blinded by partiality than any other human critic. As for the Vice-Consul, he had no such foundation of common-sense and close observation to support his certainty that such another as his Margherita had never been born to man. He worshipped his child without any reason at all. If she had been stupid, perhaps even if she had been unamiable, he

would have loved her all the same; but he took it for a special instance of the goodness of God towards him that she was delightful, and lovely, and sweet, and clever—as well as that she was Rita, which last, however, was the chief and unspeakable claim to his love.

And the house in which these two lived together was a very happy house. It is the privilege of girls to exercise this sweet reconciling power, to make a father, or a mother, at peace with fate, reconciled to all the troubles of the past. Perhaps it is inconsistent with the greater self-assertion of young manhood to give so much thought, so much care to the elder generation; certainly it is only here and there a preternaturally excellent youth who ever fills such a place in the home and the life of his parents as Rita filled to her father; and she was not preternaturally good, but mischievous, and contradictory and impetuous, as well as bright, and tender, and gentle. She never tried to make her father happy, or thought of doing her duty to him, but only loved him and lived with him in the most natural unconscious freedom of word and thought. People may pass years under the same roof without ever living with each other; but Rita poured

her young abundant life into the stream of her father's without thinking that any other channel was possible. Everything that the one did was interesting to the other, everything that happened contributed to their more perfect union. It had never occurred as yet to either that this life of theirs might change or undergo any transformation until the time should come when it would be split in twain by death; and that was a contingency which, as applying to herself (to think that her father might die had scarcely occurred to her), seemed to Rita the least likely of all possibilities, while he, on his part, if he ever took it into consideration, did it tranquilly, thinking of his own death, as men in the midst of their lives, with good health and no appearance of failing, do think of that event, as of something too far off to trouble one's-self about —inevitable, and bringing its own atmosphere of resignation with it, but too shadowy and distant to disturb anybody's peace.

It may be imagined that the event of Harry's appearance was much discussed between these two, who discussed everything. Rita had been very grateful to Harry; she had exalted him into a hero. The description she had given to

her father, when she came rushing to his side on the night of the occurrence, white and panting after her run home, had been that of a demi-god. She had described him as tall and straight as an arrow, towering head and shoulders over the common creatures about. She described the little voice in Italian which she had welcomed joyfully enough, and which had begun to intercede with her assailants with a troubled tone of politeness, and how it had been suddenly broken short by the strenuous English of the deliverer. Rita, when she got over her fright, cried and laughed together over the incident. She made it into a dramatic scene, setting Paolo's tremulous entreaties to music—and then broke in upon the cadence with short sharp English monosyllables, "Let go that girl!" She put the most flowery Italian into Paolo's mouth, then brought the other voice in, strong and brief in a masculine monotone. She did nothing but repeat this little entertainment all the evening after she had got over her fright, and when her father appeared with the hero, looking somewhat sheepish, but very strong, very English, and more good-looking than might have been hoped, Rita had been delighted. She did not take, however,

the accident romantically, or with any high-flown interest in her deliverer. Discussing him afterwards, she allowed that he did not look particularly brilliant.

"But what of that?" she cried. "Heroes never need to be clever. It is a great deal more than we deserve that he should be so good-looking. He is very good-looking, handsome and heavy, just like a hero," Rita said, "and with a story! It is a great deal more than we had any right to expect." But the story itself did not make any such impression upon her as it did upon her father. Rita was cynical for the first time, and did not think much of the quarrel with the family. "There are so many stories like that," she said, bending her brows a little; "it saves a great deal of explanation. But he is not clever enough to have invented it. He would have blushed and stammered, and even you, papa, could have found him out."

"Even I!" said Mr. Bonamy; "you speak as if my stock of intelligence was the smallest you knew."

"Not that," said Rita, laughing, "but you know you are very easily taken in, papa; oh, yes, you cannot deny that."

"You make a great deal out of a very little," said the Vice-Consul, almost angry; for it was his weak point, and consequently he was very susceptible to criticism. "Besides," he said, in his usual tone, "when I am taken in, as you say I am, it is by regular humbugs, professors of the art. There was that fellow from Geneva, was there ever a better get-up? he would have taken in old Pam himself." This was his synonym for astute and wary wisdom, as some people say Old Nick. "But Oliver has not a bit of get-up about him. Whatever he is, he is genuine, the least experienced could see as much."

"I told you," said Rita, "he is not clever enough to have invented a story; you always come round, papa, to what I say."

"Yes," said the Vice-Consul, "I *am* a great fool about you, Rita, everybody says that; no, he is not clever enough for a made-up story; and he is so much in earnest about it that it must be true."

Rita did not reply. She had no desire to prove that her father was wrong: and, besides, for once in a way her observations confirmed his. She recalled to herself the big young fellow, with his ingenuous looks, and that air of confused and deprecating surprise, as if he could not

understand why they should make so much of him; a humbug (she concluded) would have made the most of himself, and shown no surprise.

"Of course he will not be able to keep it up," Mr. Bonamy said, "they will find him out. By the way, remember to keep a look out in the agony column, they will appeal to him through that. I. O.; they are rather queer initials."

"What does I. stand for?" Rita asked.

"Isaac Oliver. It is an odd sort of name too for a young fellow like that."

"Isaac! I don't believe it can be his right name. He is no more like an Isaac than I am. Isaac ought to be a sort of soft old man, very nice and gentle, but a little silly, like Isaac in the Bible."

"My Rita, you are rather profane. Now it sounds to me like an old Jew, which is to say an old humbug, up to everything, flattering and fawning, and ready to sell his soul if he had one."

"It is you who are profane, papa; my Isaac, of course, was an old Jew; they were all Jews, all those people in the Bible: but he was more like you, a great deal, for it was he that was taken in. *That* cannot be his right name."

"Whose right name? you jump so from the Bible to yesterday that you are confusing. I am obliged to you for the compliment about the patriarch. And as for our young fellow, I think it very likely that Oliver is not his name; but an *alias* is seldom carried so far as the Christian name; he must be Isaac, I am afraid, though it is disenchanting."

"Poor Mr. Oliver," Rita said. "There is not very much enchantment about him anyhow. Yes, yes, he is just the right thing for a hero: but there ought to be something behind, he ought to be a little clever, or witty, or poetical, or something, before there can be any enchantment. Oh yes, it was quite right to ask him for Sunday. He will be very tranquillizing, quite Sunday fare."

"That was what I thought," her father said. "You will try all your arts upon him, you will turn him inside out. In half-an-hour you will find out more than I would in a day."

"I shall not want to find out," said Rita; "if he is so secret, why should I try to penetrate his mystery? Mysteries, papa, I have often told you, are seldom worth finding out." And they both laughed at this utterance of wisdom: but yet

there was a kind of understanding, at all events on Rita's side, that it was she who was the most prudent of the two.

Harry met them at church on Sunday morning. There were a great many people at the English Church, and they had the usual look of sectarianism and conventicalism which a small foreign community, holding its select little "diet of worship" (as we say in Scotland) in its separate church, in the midst of a large Catholic community, always has. It is hard to understand why the mere fact of not being able to say our prayers along with the mass of our fellow-creatures, should give everywhere that look of narrow superiority, yet lurking sense of disadvantage. Amid all the salutations at the church-doors, which showed how the little community hung together, Harry was shy of penetrating the mass, and held himself modestly apart, waiting in the background till his friends disengaged themselves from the crowd. A stranger was more remarked in that close circle than he would have been in towns more frequented by tourists; and his appearance was so distinctively, almost so ideally English, that he caught a great many eyes. A tall young fellow, muscular and strong,

with curling fair hair, a light moustache, a ruddy complexion, and an English made coat, at once attracted the attention of the merchants and officials who made up the congregation. Who was he? When the Vice-Consul was seen to go up to him, and he walked off by Rita's side, their fellow-worshippers soon came to a distinct conclusion on the subject. He was some young English swell who had brought letters from influential persons at home, and whom Mr. Bonamy would naturally make the most of. That was the best of an official position, was the commentary of more than one looker-on—that the best people were always sent to you—that whereas all the straggling tourists who were nobody, were recommended by troublesome acquaintances to ordinary residents in a town, the Consul had all the people of distinction, and though he himself held no particular rank, made acquaintance, and occasionally formed alliances, with very superior people indeed. Many looks were in consequence cast after Harry, as very happy, yet very humble, he walked off by Rita's side. He thought that it was he who had the advantage, while the spectators considered him a distinguished visitor, and envied the Vice-Consul, whose position made his

house the natural head-quarters for such fine people. He walked through the shady streets, saying very little, feeling himself quite happy without speech, and it seemed to him like the repetition of a dream when he came in again to the cool dining-room, and sat down once more between the father and daughter. It was only a few days since he had done that for the first time, coming in, like a man in a dream, to find an unknown world opened to him. Now the world was no longer unknown, he had got his place in it, he had the prospect before him of knowing it better and better, it was his home, as it was that of the others.

With a strange feeling of security and continuance he took his place at the table. He was never a great talker, and he allowed his entertainers to talk over him, not being so quick to understand their allusions, and all the shades of meaning in their rapid conversation, as he would have wished. Sometimes Rita would turn to him with a pleasant word, bringing him into the current, sometimes Mr. Bonamy would say something that made an answer needful; but for the most part he was silent, taking his share only with looks. He did the best he could for

himself by this means, for his face was bright, brighter perhaps than his intelligence, and he had the pleasant art of being interested, whether he quite understood or not. His look, which was half wistful, half understanding, with a little eagerness in it, a desire to follow what was being said, and a naïve comprehension that it was slightly above him, caught Rita's attention in spite of herself. So far as she was aware, this young woman was more fond of intellectual people and their discourse than of anything else in the world. If there was one thing she was sure of, it was her preference for this kind of society, her disdain of trivial minds, and the common chatter of the everyday world. And she had already expressed her opinion about Harry, that he would do very well for a hero of the muscular kind, but as for any special interest, a man required something more, a touch of poetry or intellect, or at least, if nothing else, cleverness, to recommend him to the attention. It happened, however, two or three times over, that when Rita's eyes were travelling the length of the table to meet her father's, with whom she was talking, they were caught by Harry's, who sat at the side. Harry had uttered nothing that

was not commonplace, and, indeed, he had not said much at all; but when he thus caught her eye, and forced her to look at him, his face was more eloquent than his tongue. It was not at any time an unmeaning face, and to-day it meant a great deal; it meant a conviction that he was very happily placed between two such bright and clever people; it meant great attention and admiration and interest. Rita was caught by it as if he had put forth his hand to stop her as she passed him. Stupid! how could she have thought him stupid? That look was not stupid, not even heavy or pre-occupied, like so many other young Englishmen, who looked distrait when anything was talked of beyond their own little capacities. Harry had not at all this aspect. If his mind was not quite up to the mark of their conversation his attention was. He wanted to listen and to understand. She looked at him, thus, once, twice, feeling each time more favourably disposed—and the third time she fairly stopped and turned round and addressed him.

"Mr. Oliver," she said, "we are very uncivil, papa and I. We are so used to talking to each other that, when there is anyone here, if he does not stop us and force us to listen to him, we

just go on. I have felt how silly it was. I wish you would put a stop to us, and make us listen to you."

"But I should not like that," said Harry; "you talk a great deal better than I do. Talking was never any gift of mine; but I like to listen. I am picking up a great deal, though you may not think it. Everything is so new to me here."

"Well, then, I will ask you a very silly question," said Rita; "I will ask you what everybody will ask you, and of course you cannot tell yet how to answer; but you will answer all the same. How do you like Leghorn, Mr. Oliver? Do you think you will like us when you know us better? I hope you think that is a nice commonplace beginning," said Rita, laughing; and a faint little colour came over her of half amusement and half self-reproach.

"Indeed, I don't think it silly at all; I am commonplace myself," said Harry, with a little sigh. "I wish I could be more remarkable, but I can't. Yes, I like Leghorn very much, and I think I shall like all the people I know, more and more as I know them better. But I don't know many people. Except Mr. Bonamy and yourself,

who have been so kind to me, I have got but one friend."

"One friend, hear him! as if that was a thing that could be picked up at every corner," the Vice-Consul said.

"I never saw anything like him," said Harry, "he is like a child—and very simple in his ways of thinking. He is twenty times better than I am, and yet I feel sometimes as if I must laugh. You don't know what strange people we English are, Miss Bonamy. We can see how good a thing is, and yet we can't help laughing if it is a little out of the way."

"Then," said Rita, "tell me why. I have no way of knowing but what people tell me. There are things said about Englishmen just as there are things said about women, in general. Now the women I know are quite unlike each other. I cannot imagine any one thing that they would all think or do. Are Englishmen all the same?"

"Now, Oliver, be on your guard," said her father, "that's one of her theories. She wants to push you into a corner and compel you to commit yourself. Women have this and that way of thinking, we all say, don't we? and it's quite true. 'Really!' says this little person, 'I

suppose, then, women are all exactly like each other?' Have a care, my young friend; she looks innocent, but I don't advise you to let yourself fall into her hands."

"When I said Englishmen"—said Harry, faltering; then he gathered a little boldness—"We are not all like each other: but this is rather true of all of us—at least, so I think: we jeer at things we don't understand."

"Bravo," said the Vice-Consul, clapping his hands, "I see you understand our dear countrymen."

"We don't mean much harm," said Harry, led on beyond himself. "I suppose that in other countries just the same happens in different ways. When people act in a way we should not think of acting, we think it is so strange that we—laugh at them. It is wrong, I have no doubt, and silly, but still we do it. The first thing is, we laugh at them—Italians don't seem to do so. They are most polite."

"And the French don't do it."

"Papa, they do a great deal worse," said Rita; "for the language, for instance, they are far more hard than you. When anyone speaks English badly, you laugh, but you don't mind.

The Frenchman doesn't laugh, he is horribly polite—but he thinks the worse of you for ever after. I see what you mean. There is a kind of a way you have of looking at things in the same light, which does not mean that you are alike, or all thinking in the same way. Perhaps," said Rita, meditatively, "that may be true of Englishmen—and women too. Yes, I see how that might be true. I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Oliver, for putting it in so clear a light."

Harry could only stare at her with a mixture of amazement and gratification. He to be applauded for putting something in a clear light! and by Rita, who knew so much more than he did. He could not but laugh within himself at the unlikelihood of it: yet he was gratified by the thought.

CHAPTER VIII.

HARRY'S PROGRESS.

AFTER this, Harry "settled down." It was a somewhat disappointing, disenchanting process, but still it was better than it appeared at the first glance. Paolo, finding that his friend could not be happy without a sitting-room, which seemed to himself the most unnecessary of luxuries, exerted himself to procure an appartamento for him which should include this, and managed, after a little delay, to do so, at a price so modest that Harry was astonished, and the padrone di casa much disgusted and indignant when he found that he had actually suffered his rooms to go, at a rent extravagant only for Italians, to an Englishman. The landlord was so disappointed and annoyed by this that the occa-

sion made him voluble; for "Ecco!" he said, "a countryman, that is—a countryman. He knows as much as we do. He is aware of everything. He can do what he pleases. That he should have the rooms cheap, that understands itself: that is all just. But a stranger! And, on the other hand, they want so much more, these strangers. They will demand breakfast, and even refreshments in the evening! They are so lazy they will not give themselves the pain to descend to the caffè for their coffee, which is the natural way, but will demand to have it here, which is endless trouble. I never could have believed that Ser Paolo, who is a person of education, would so have treated an old neighbour." He said so much on the subject that Harry, with something of that impatience and careless magnificence which are (supposedly) the characteristics of the English, declared that, rather than be so persecuted, he would pay twenty lire a month more than had been asked of him, an offer which made the padrone think him a great fool, but a true Englishman, and which drove Paolo nearly out of himself with indignation. It may be understood by this fact that Harry soon picked up as much Italian as made him understand at least

the tone of address, whether it was friendly or angry: and in smaller matters he was soon able to make himself understood.

The first night of his residence in his new quarters, when he heard Paolo close the door behind him, and felt himself left all alone at the top of a tall Italian house, without a soul within call, gazing round him at the four bare white walls, his lamp looking at him with three unwinking eyes, and not a trace of anything that looked like home—vain word!—the young fellow was altogether overcome, and staring round with a wild look of despair, was as near breaking into idle tears as ever man was. But what was the use? He had made his bed (or his people had made it for him, as he thought), and there he must lie. He had half a dozen books on the table: one upon the laws that affect shipping and the maritime code, another on International Law generally, the rest Italian grammars and dictionaries, a volume of easy little stories in the same language, and that well-known volume of Silvio Pellico, out of which so many people have learned their first Italian lessons. They were none of them very interesting to Harry. "Le Mie Prigioni," when you

have made it out with the aid of a dictionary, is not more tempting than any other book would be under these circumstances. They were as blank as the white walls, the silent room, the dead solitude of the place, to Harry. A yellow novel, if he could have got that, would have been precious to him. But he had not even that to fall back upon. He crept dismally to bed, unable to contemplate his fate, and turned his face to the wall, much as his mother was doing at home. But in the morning things were better; and though he never could reconcile himself to the gloom and solitude of his appartamento at night, during the day things went tolerably well with him when he began to know what was being said around him, and to wake up to the new insight which a new language confers. Gradually he began to take a little interest in the porter's family, in the shrill padrona, shrieking her orders and her commentaries from the balcony of the fourth piano across the deep well of the court-yard, who was a terrible nuisance, yet by and by began to feel homelike, so that he missed her sharp peacock-cry when the arrival of a baby compelled a brief withdrawal from her usual active survey of the affairs of her tenants. And so the

time went on, and months passed, and Harry became accustomed to his life.

There were times, however, in which those slow beginnings of content which soothed Harry's mind, rose into something a great deal higher and brighter: and these were the hours which he spent in the private rooms at the Consulate, where, by degrees, he became very familiar, a sort of son of the house. Harry never knew how this happened, nor did the Bonamys themselves, who, bit by bit, opened their doors more completely to him. They had never done so before to any clerk. The office generally was held at arm's length by the head of it. He was thought proud by the *employés* generally. What was he, many even asked, that he should give himself so many airs? But he never gave himself any airs to Harry. Even when they began to forget that romance about the young squire who had quarrelled with his family, which was entirely their own invention, they did not turn away from or cast off the stranger who, falling into their midst with no recommendations at all, had made himself so strong a footing amongst them, partly from accident, partly from imagination. Very soon, indeed, Harry came to

be considered as part of the family; a ready hand to be appealed to for everything; a ready hearer, though he did not always understand: an invariably sympathetic and trustworthy friend of the house. To Mr. Bonamy it was a great advantage to have some one in the office whom he could treat upon this footing; to whom he could speak confidentially of all that occurred, and with whom, if need were, even in the bosom of society, he could confer on any accident of official business, sending Harry off to do this or that, even from the card-table where he was playing round games with the younger guests, or out of the heart of a valse, when need was. Harry liked the dance, and was merry and useful at the card-playing, but he never complained or grumbled if he were sent away. He had to come back late when the company was gone, to make his report, and that privilege atoned to him for the self-sacrifice. On such occasions, when the great *salone* was still all alight, and Rita reposing upon the sofa, or buried in a great chair, after her exertions, while the Vice-Consul had already put on the light dressing-gown in which he smoked his evening cigar, the young man, returning, had the pleasantest welcome. Mr. Bonamy put

towards him his box of cigarettes; the windows were all open; the warm Italian night glowing out of doors; the stars shining, and every breath of the soft air a delight. In that Italian room the light smoke was not thought out of place. Rita had been used to it all her life. She might have taken one of these little cigarettes herself and nobody thought any harm; but, fortunately for Harry's feelings, to whom it would have been a very terrible profanation of a girl's lips, she did not. But she lay back in her chair, her pale face and dark locks relieved upon the soft, rich old damask, and watched the two men with a smile. The Consul, who loved everything that was beautiful, had his smoking-coat also made of damask—a piece of brocade, in colours which Harry thought faded—and he, too, threw himself negligently back in his chair and listened to his young aide-de-camp's report, with his fine head on one side, like a benevolent prince listening to the information collected for him by a young prime minister, all visionary, and eager in his plans for the benefit of their people. Perhaps it was only a refractory ship-captain whom Harry had talked into submission, or an impatient Englishman whose suspicions of extortion had

got him into trouble; and sometimes the three would laugh over the characteristic follies of their countrymen, and incapaity to understand the grandiloquence of the Italian authorities. When Harry got to be sufficiently strong in the language, he would himself make very merry over the *sentimento magnifico* of the professional pillagers whose charges here and there drove a stranger wild, but who always professed the noblest superiority to all interested motives. Rita, who was more than half an Italian, was sometimes piqued by the laughter in which her father joined, and would stand up for the kindly race to whom she owed half her blood and all her training. She would shine out from the soft background when she thus roused herself in defence of her people, her great dark eyes glowing, her white little figure all alive with energy. "You are all made up of suspicions, you English," she said. "You think everyone wants to cheat you, to get your money from you. Yes, and it is you who want to get what they have from them. I wonder who it is who picks up the pictures, and the *bric-à-brac*, and shakes his head" (which she did with a good imitation of her father's benevolent regret), "and complains that all the little dealers are

beginning to know the value of the things they have to sell, eh, papa? Old Leonardi showed his *sentimento magnifico* when he let you have that little Ghirlandajo for next to nothing."

"I don't believe it is a Ghirlandajo—of his school, that is all," said the Consul, blandy, "and he lets me have it cheap—not for nothing: he lets me have it cheap because he thinks the English travellers will see it here and will go to him to be fleeced, that is the best reason he has, I fear."

"And if it is, you take advantage of it," cried Rita. "Which is worst? There was that piece of lace the other day. I said (it was quite true) what shall I do with it, Signor Giovanni? it is not enough for a dress; and he said, in the prettiest way, the Signorina shall put it upon her handkerchief to remind her of old Leonardi. I took it; what could I do? it would have made him angry if I had refused it after that. Was not that the *sentimento magnifico*, Mr. Oliver—you who don't believe in my Italians? If I had offered him money for it he would never have spoken to me again."

"I thought he was an old Jew," said Harry;

"but I see he is a fine old fellow, and I shall go and buy something from him to-morrow. He will cheat me; but I shan't mind after what you have said."

"He will cheat you," said the Vice-Consul, with equanimity; "though he has a fine sense of the proper time to be honest, and the proper time to be liberal all the same; but let us hear how you got your Englishman out of his clutches, for that is the business immediately in hand."

And then Harry returned to his story, and told how the poor tourist had raved and blasphemed, how he had bought a picture which was vouched for as genuine, and it was found to be a flagrant copy; and how old Leonardi had perjured himself over and over again, and sworn by all the saints that there could be no doubt of its authenticity, holding up his fine old Italian head in the very presence of the painter, who had made the copy, and denying all knowledge of it. The tourist, whose settled conviction it was that "the natives" everywhere were in league against him, was, however, the chief point in Harry's report. He had rather thought so himself when he landed in Leghorn, and the feeling which had made him refuse Paolo's first offer of service, and

carry his own portmanteau, and hunt out the hotel for himself, still lingered in his bosom. He understood the character so well that he set it forth with great power before his audience; and Harry was so much gratified by his success, and by the gradual blowing away of the cloud which was on Rita's countenance, and the delightful laughter with which she chimed in after a while, that he rose into higher heights. He himself was just beginning to awake to the humours of the Englishman abroad, and it was very pleasant to find himself superior to them, as one who understood the language and knew the people, and could explain a good many mistakes and misapprehensions away.

"Mr. Oliver, you are very English," Rita said gravely, after the story and the laughter were over. She was apt to change in a moment, and with the smile just disappearing from her lips, to produce the most serious remark.

"Am I?" said Harry, a little crestfallen; for he rather thought he had made it apparent that he was very superior to the English—that is the common English who travel, and who are often, as we all hasten to tell our foreign friends, so little credit to the race. Then he added with more

spirit, "I suppose I am very English. What else could I be? I have only been a year away.

"Do you call this 'away?'" she said, with a somewhat startled tone. "Yes, of course it is 'away.' Over there is what you have always been used to—that is home—of course;" but the idea seemed to be new to Rita, and not to give her pleasure. The Vice-Consul had gone off to his business-room to get something that was wanted, and the two young people were alone.

"It may be home," said Harry, with a roused and almost irritated tone; "but I shall never see it again. Home has so many meanings. I shall say presently I am going home, and I shall mean my appartamento—as Paolo calls it—not very much of a home," he said, with a sharp laugh.

"Isn't it? I say home, too, when I speak of England; but I shall never see it. Do you know I am never to be allowed to go to England, Mr. Oliver? That makes me like to hear everything about it. Then you and I are the same in that; but you will change your mind."

"You are much more likely to change your mind," said Harry. "I—have good reason——"

"And do you think I have not good reason too? When my mother went there, she died."

"She might have died anywhere," Harry said.

"It is harsh of you to say so. Yes, to be sure she might have died anywhere; but they say it is so cold in England," said Rita, with a little shiver; the night air seemed all at once to have grown chilly. She looked at the big window close to her and shivered again. Harry got up and closed it without a word.

"It is cold, when you expect it to be cold," said Harry; "that is pretty often, to be sure: but it does not take you in an underhand way like this. In England it is all above-board; it blows right in your face, it does not steal in like *that* behind your back and chill you. Things are honest at home. I think I could take you all over England, and you would get no harm."

"Could you?" said Rita eagerly; "do you know a way? but how then, Mr. Oliver? tell me, do you know a way?"

"It would be just to take care of you," said Harry, with a blush. "I know *that* way. I should understand that you wanted taking care of, and I would take care of you. For my part, I should not be a bit afraid."

Rita did not notice the blush on his face. The

desire of her heart was to go to England, and this made her think. She had the credulity of her birthplace about wonderful elixirs and miraculous ways of doing a dangerous thing. She looked at him dreamily, yet eagerly, with her great eyes. "But *how* should you do it?" she repeated, "Mr. Oliver; if there is some particular way, will you tell me? For if you only knew—if you could only know how I wish to go to England——!"

"There is no particular way," said Harry; "if I were ever to go back home, which I never shall—and if you were to go with me, which most likely you never would—then you should go, and no harm would happen to you; that is all I know."

He spoke abruptly, and he was flushed and hasty. Rita did not think at the moment what it meant; she sat very quiet in her great chair, while her father came in and resumed the conversation—thinking over what he had said. Immediately there had risen before her a vision of the white cliffs she had heard of so often, and of green fields and red roofs, and of all the special features of English scenery which she had read of. What could it be that made him so sure? "If I were ever to go, which I never shall—and if you

were to come with me, which most likely you never would—— Well, no," Rita said to herself, with a half smile, "not much likelihood of that; how could I go with him? he means it we were to take him with us—he means——" and then she came to a pause, and a sudden reflection of the colour on Harry's face wavered over hers for a minute; only a minute. She was not altogether inexperienced in life; she had already been the subject of several proposals addressed to her father, which he had declined after reference to Rita, so that she was aware that she was looked upon with favourable eyes by various persons, and that the love which is so much talked of in books might light upon her at any moment. Rita had, for her part, no particular objection; she had even left the door of her heart open, so that when he was thereabout that intrusive sentiment might come in if he pleased. But up to this moment he had not come in; the door had stood open, but nothing had entered except poetry and gentle thoughts. But Rita, after this conversation, experienced a very curious sensation. She felt not as if anyone had got in by the door, but as if some one passing had half stumbled against it, finding it closed, and, no

answer being given, had gone his way. In the first haze of this idea she got up from her chair and said good night, and went off to her room, complaining that she was sleepy. But she was not sleepy; she sat down and began to think as soon as she had got within the protection of her chamber. It was not any personal feeling that moved her, far less any strong emotion; but all at once she was conscious of a keen and lively curiosity springing up in her mind, eager and lively as her nature. Did he mean——? What did he mean? "If I were to go to England—which I never shall—and if you were to come with me——" Why should she go with him? What reason could there be for such a thing, what excuse? He must be mad to make such a suggestion; but yet it kept coming back to her. "If I were to go, and if you were to come with me." Certainly the door of that hidden chamber in her heart had swung to and closed, and somebody passing, a stranger, had run up against it, and shaken it, as if to try whether it would be easy to open. It was a very strange suggestion. Rita had been sought by persons of condition, by people who had something to offer, and who had made their proposals, as everybody who respects himself

does in Italy, to the young lady's father. But here was somebody who was nobody, and who took hold of the handle of that door of her heart, which she had believed to be open, but which had evidently closed of itself, and gave it a sharp shake, without thinking of her father or any consequences whatever. She thought of it for a long time, turning it over and over with the greatest curiosity. It was a new thing in her experience. He wanted a great many of the qualities which she considered indispensable in a man. First and chiefest of all he was not clever. He knew nothing about books, he scarcely knew a picture when he saw one. Instead of hunting about in the *bric-à-brac* shops as her father did, and as even little Paolo Thompson (whom Mr. Oliver called Paul-ó) was in the habit of doing, picking up wonderful things now and then, this stranger gazed with blank eyes at the treasures, and could not understand them. He was altogether a different kind of man from any she had ever seen, a homelier, duller sort of man; and yet he was not dull. The whole house was quiet and asleep when Rita suddenly sprang up from this long reverie, catching sight of her own big eyes in her looking-glass, and wonder-

ing at the wonder in them. She had got a new idea into her active little head. It was something novel and curious, and very amusing, but it did not seem to her at all necessary that it should ever come to anything. She wondered what he would say next, or how he would look, or what he would do. She was pleased on the whole to think that now perhaps she would have an opportunity of watching what a man looked like in such circumstances as these, which is a thing always interesting and, some people think, very amusing to see.

As for Harry, he went home that evening with a sensation not less extraordinary, but much more definite than that of Rita. He had not thought of the meaning of what he was saying till he had said it; he had not been aware of meaning anything, and yet he knew now that he did mean it. What had he been doing? Without a name, without a home, without anything in the world, he had been so foolish as to fall in love with a girl who, in the best of circumstances, would have been above him. The Joscelyns thought a great deal of themselves; but when Harry thought of the parlour at the White House, and then of Rita's drawing-room, he felt that she

was immeasurably above him, and that to say such a thing to her was not only wrong, but mean and ungenerous. If you were to come with me— Good life, why had he suggested that to her? *She* come with him? It seemed ridiculous, more out of the question to Harry than it had done to Rita. He was angry beyond measure with himself for letting himself be run away with, so to speak, by the foolish impulse of the moment. For he had never meant to say it, or indeed to suggest any idea of the kind. He was full of sense, though passion had him in its power when it once got hold of him. In the meantime, however, there was no question of passion. It was the pleasure of his life to be with Rita, to see her, to do little services for her, to hear her talk; but when the idea was suddenly set before him that he might marry Rita and carry her away with him, Harry was more frightened than she was. He to think of such a thing! He walked home at such a pace, with such a swift, impatient step, that the few passengers in the streets turned about to look after him, wondering what business he might have in hand—if he were going for a doctor, or any such urgent occasion; but Harry was walking fast only to keep up with his thoughts, which had

suddenly been let loose like colts in a pasture, and were all careering about wildly, so that it was impossible to catch or lay hold upon them. How could he have been so mad as to have let them loose! and he wondered had she understood him? But how could she understand him, a child like that? she was too innocent to understand.. He hurried along to his apartment in full chase after that wild herd of thoughts and imaginations. If he had them but once safely shut up again under lock and key certainly it would be a strong temptation indeed that would tempt him to let them loose.

CHAPTER IX.

A REVELATION.

HARRY found himself thus brought up, and forced to give, to himself, an account of himself, such as he had never in his consciousness been compelled to make before. He was in an altogether new position, and it was indispensable that he should know where it was leading to, and what was meant by it. There had been no occasion to inquire into this before. He had plenty to do learning Italian, learning about the shipping, getting into the duties of his new life. The Consul's house and the Consul's daughter had been his little bit of happiness, his reward after his work, his diversion from those dismal sensations of utter solitude which had almost overwhelmed him at first; and he had not thought of

any complication of interests or feelings. Nothing need have awakened him from this comfortable state if it had not been that unlucky conversation about going to England. Why should he have talked about going to England? He never meant to go back, or, if ever, not at least until he had grown rich and altogether independent of *them* and their kindness. But in the meantime there did not seem any immediate likelihood of growing rich, and why he should have stepped outside all the boundaries of his life and suggested the sudden possibility of going home and taking Miss Bonamy with him, baffled Harry's comprehension. Sometimes we say and even do things which on looking back upon them we feel were not our doing at all, but that of some one else, rather our enemy than otherwise, some one making a distinct effort to get us into trouble. This was Harry's sensation now; he was half angry and half frightened. It was some malign, mischievous traitor wanting to betray him, not himself, who had said that. He went home breathless, and when he had climbed all those dark stairs to his rooms, and lighted his lamp, he sat down, and, as it were, called a council of himself, to inquire who had done it. But it is a great deal

easier to feel that some one has betrayed us in this way than it is to determine who has done it; for those internal traitors have no names, and cannot be brought to the bar. His investigation so far was fruitless; but it was fertile enough in other ways, in ways in which he did not feel any anxiety to investigate. Harry had never been brought into familiar intercourse with any girl before. He had seen them at a distance, in circumstances which made no approach possible, even if he had desired it; and he did not know that he had ever desired it. Once or twice he had been struck by a pretty face, and had felt a passing wish, mingled with reluctance, to make further acquaintance with it; that is he would have wished it if he had been able to get over his shyness, and the difficulty of knowing what to say, and the trouble of overcoming all the preliminary obstacles. But here none of these difficulties had existed; he had come quite naturally into Rita's acquaintance at once, as if she had been a comrade of his own. There had been no shyness, no hesitation, but the easy talk of a table at which strangers were constantly appearing and disappearing, and a house in which this young creature, though so young, was the mistress, and used to all the

exertions necessary to set people at their ease. He had admired her he said to himself, from the first —who could help admiring her? but it had been so clearly her part to entertain and amuse the people about her, and she had been so pleasantly indifferent, so innocently at her ease, so oblivious of his presence often, so kind when her attention was called to him, that all those little bulwarks of freedom, which boys and girls when they are made conscious of each other, set up instinctively, had been useless in this case. She was neither afraid of him nor solicitous about him. Sometimes she took no more notice than if he had been a cabbage, and at other times was as seriously confidential as if he had been eighty. Harry had liked all the ways of it. He had been piqued a little sometimes, but afterwards had found it quite natural, and liked her friendliness and indifference, and the occasional moment of household intimacy, when she would look at him to indicate some little service she wanted, as she might have looked at her brother, without words, taking his interest and compliance for granted. And gradually, without any thought, this had come to be the pleasure and support of Harry's life. When he did not see her, when he was not at the house

for a whole day, it was a dull day indeed; but still faintly illuminated by to-morrow, when he was sure to see her. When she went away upon a visit, which happened once, the Consul's despondency kept him in countenance. Mr. Bonamy adopted Harry in her place. "Come in and help me to eat something," he said, "I can't bear her empty seat. When my Rita is away I feel inclined to hang myself." Harry had almost betrayed himself (to himself) by the warmth of the sympathy which he bestowed upon the disconsolate father; but as Mr. Bonamy ended by a doleful laugh at himself as an old fool, Harry laughed too, and the catastrophe was averted, and so things had gone on for a whole long year.

What a year that had been!—far the most wonderful of Harry's life. So many new things had happened to him; he had been torn out of all his old habits, and made into another man with a new set of habits—as new as the light-coloured clothes in which alone it was possible to live on those southern coasts. And he had become so much the more of a man that he was now, so to speak, two men, one developed out of the other. He looked back upon the Henry Joscelyn of Liverpool with a mixture of amusement and

pity. He had been a poor sort of limited creature, not knowing much; going half asleep between his office and his lodgings, now and then going to a poor theatre, walking about with small clerks in other offices, who knew nothing more than their own little gossip and the town news, and the fluctuations of trade. Perhaps it was a sign that Harry himself had not yet reached any great elevation, that he thought his present life so greatly superior. The reader knows he had not thought so always. He had compared his big, bare room, with its four white walls, most unfavourably with the carpeted and curtained parlour of his Liverpool experiences. Bnt since that time his mind had undergone many transformations. His appartamento had become to him what Paolo's was, a decent and tranquil shelter for the night. He had no longer thought of the respectabilities, of sitting there for a whole evening, of drinking tea, and having his friends to see him there. These were old customs at which he smiled. He had acquired a great many others which were now to him not only a second nature, but far more enjoyable, more life-like, he thought, than the old. At all events, they were the habits of the present, not of the

past. And amidst these changes, the advance in which might be questionable, were various other changes in Harry's life of which the advantage was unquestionable. To live half his time in the Consul's house, between a man of culture and education, and a young, fresh, intelligent girl, who had grown up knowing a world of things until then sealed books to Harry; and to have to do, not with mere bookkeeping, and sales, and goods of various descriptions, but with men, in a hundred little perplexities, out of which his skill, his patience, his superior knowledge, had to deliver them—were educating influences of the most active kind. He was a different man, and he felt himself to be so. How much he was the same man of course it was more difficult for Harry to see.

And here, in his new life, he had come to the first great difficulty; things had gone on smoothly, not a hitch anywhere. He had discharged all his duties to the satisfaction of his chief. He had acquired the very phraseology of a much higher class than that which he naturally belonged to, and talked of his chief as if he had been a fine gentleman in a public office. Many people, indeed, believed that Harry had been sent

out by the "F.O." with special instructions to keep Mr. Bonamy in order; and many more that he had come to Mr. Bonamy with the strongest recommendations from that dignified and mysterious power. Nobody guessed that he had been picked up off the streets, so to speak, by the mere generous caprice and mistaken romantic fancy of the rich official, who might, for all he knew, have been jeopardising the credit of the office by admitting a young adventurer to its sacred shelter. Mr. Bonamy had long ago forgotten that Harry had come to his present promotion in any illegitimate or irregular way, or that the appointment had occurred otherwise than in the ordinary course; and Oliver was his right hand, his constant refuge, his aide-de-camp in all things. He had even forgotten that he did not know all about the origin of the stranger who was now so freely admitted to his house. He was rash in that as in other matters, and though he would have given his life for his daughter it never occurred to him to take those precautions about her which the most selfish parent usually thinks it necessary to take. Everything had gone smoothly for Harry. At the Consul's house he had met "the best people" that were to be found in Leghorn,

the rich English merchants, and also many Italians, old traditionary friends of Rita's mother, who was of Italian blood. By this time Harry had got a footing among them, and was asked to other houses, and known everywhere. Everything was going smoothly. He had no reason to be discontented or anxious about his future life. Everybody knew him, and nobody knew other than good of him. Whatever happened he would never again be the desolate stranger, with a new name, and no reputation, who had landed friendless on these shores.

And yet, with all these advantages, and this progress, suddenly, in a moment, he was brought to a standstill by this discovery. What wonder if Harry was provoked beyond bearing with himself and that traitor in him, who would not be brought to book? There was something almost ludicrous in his dismay. Why couldn't you hold your tongue? he said, indignantly, to that something within him. Who wanted to know what you were thinking? What is the good of it now you have let it out? It was a ridiculous discussion, there being no one to reply, but yet it gave expression to the self-provoked and impatient character of Harry's dilemma. For how was he

to banish it back again and go on as if that idiotic suggestion had never been made?

Love is not so simple a thing as people think, at least in these artificial days. In the old simple story-books, and, indeed, often still in life, when such a revelation as this comes to a man, he jumps at once to the natural conclusion, throws himself at once into the situation, wooes, proposes, and, if he is successful, ends by being at least—engaged. Sometimes he does this with a noble indifference to circumstances and possibilities, or, at least, an indifference which, when he has spirit enough to take the consequences upon himself, and boldly hew possibility out of impossibility, is noble. Sometimes he leaps the intervening steps and thinks of nothing but of marrying as the natural and inevitable conclusion. The woman invariably does this; love to her means marriage, or it means nothing at all. It is an offence to her delicacy to play with it, to keep any decision at arm's length, as men often think themselves justified in doing; so that it remains more simple (unless she is a coquette) in her case than in his. But with a man, now-a-days, at least, to enjoy all the gratifications and delicate bloom of nascent love without coming to any crisis, which

must make an entire change of all these relations and modes of living necessary, is often very desirable. But this reluctance to come to a decision, though sometimes selfish, is not so always; and in Harry's case it was not selfish. He had not walked open-eyed into this snare which life is continually setting for young feet; he had tumbled into it unawares; and in his situation, being unlucky enough to have tumbled into it, his only policy, his only honourable course, was either to get out of it with as much expedition as possible, or to hold his tongue about it, and never to betray his plight to the other person involved. But Harry had been betrayed, to himself, at least, if not to *her*, and the question now was, what was he to do? He sat and thought over this question, as on the other side of it Rita was doing—though this he did not know, nor guess; but he could not for his part make anything of it. He could not keep away from the Consul's house, or shut himself out from her society, without further betrayal. His situation was such that if he remitted his visits, if he failed to appear with all the ease and familiarity to which he had been admitted, and which had been growing for a year past, he could not fail to be questioned on the

subject, and his secret drawn from him. Even if he kept a little aloof from Rita, avoided her as much as civility permitted, and avoided occasions of being with her, that also would be remarked. What was he to do? For now that he had once betrayed himself who could guarantee that, continuing to see her every day, as he had been doing, he might, on some other occasion, betray himself still more distinctly. His embarrassment and trouble grew the more he thought of it. It could not be, surely, that he would be compelled to go out upon the desert world again and begin anew? Surely, surely, that would not be necessary! And yet, what was he to do? The question on Rita's side by no means interfered with her rest, save for that hour or so when she chose to think of it, instead of brushing her hair; but it took away Harry's, upon whom all the responsibility rested. Her feeling on the matter came only the length of a certain amused interest and curiosity as to how he would conduct himself in the future, and what he meant by these odd speeches; but his affected all his life Whether he should stay where he was, or go away; whether he should have to throw aside again all his hopes of

advancement, all his comfort and renewed confidence in his fate, all hung in the balance. He turned uneasily on his bed all the night through, dozing and dreaming of it, and waking to ask the same question again. But the night brings counsel, and when he woke somewhat late the next morning from the sleep which overtook him at last in the midst of his deliberations, he woke with a new idea in his mind, as we so often do, after a long consideration. The first words he said to himself as he woke were, "I will ask Paolo." For a moment he could not tell what the momentous subject was that he was to ask Paolo about.

Paolo had continued to be Harry's faithful friend; but their intercourse had been disturbed by the society at the Consulate, for, except on some special occasion, he was not important enough to be introduced to all the fine company that assembled there; only now and then when all the *employés* were asked, and a little semi-public fête for them banished the fine people, did Paolo enter these enchanted walls, and talk with the young mistress of the house. He had scarcely ever talked to Harry of the Signorina, but when he did mention her there had been a slightly

cynical tone in his remarks. To tell the truth, Paolo had never got over that first appearance of the Vice-Consul's daughter in the street at night. He had recognized her, clinging to her old attendant, hurrying away, while Harry, all unconscious of what was to come of it, had stopped the Italians who were pursuing her, and summarily knocked down the Englishman. Paolo was not ill-natured, nor given to ill-thinking, but he was an Italian, and he could not imagine any perfectly virtuous motive which could have taken a young lady out of her house at that hour. That love or intrigue had something to do with it he was convinced, and all the proof in the world could not have persuaded him otherwise. But he did not wish to throw any indiscreet light upon her proceedings, or to betray her to the world. With some sense of this, though without ever explaining to himself how it was that he had such a feeling, Harry had refrained from telling him the climax of the story. He had left the Consul's sudden friendship unexplained, Paolo requiring no explanation of it, and feeling it the most simple and natural thing in the world. But during the whole interval there had been in Paolo's tone a note of un-

expressed warning against the Vice-Consul's daughter; he had not said anything, but he had left something to be inferred. This Harry had sometimes resented, sometimes laughed at, but he had never taken the warning or been moved by the tone. He thought it was a prejudice such as one person sometimes feels quite unaccountably against another; or that perhaps it was some pique; perhaps that Paolo himself had admired too much the young princess who was so entirely out of his reach: but whatever was the cause, he was conscious enough that Paolo was not favourable to the lady of his thoughts. And he resolved accordingly to ask the advice of his friend on the grand question only. He would not give him any special information, or even indicate, however vaguely, who the lady was. That he should speak to Paolo at all on the subject showed that a change had come over Harry's thoughts. It would be too much to say that he did not entertain still a somewhat contemptuous estimate of the little "foreigner" who had sworn eternal friendship at first sight, and had wept, and even kissed his friend, in his rapture at his good fortune. When Harry recalled that embrace he grew red still, with the undying indignation which moves a man when he has

been made ridiculous. And he still treated Paolo *de haut en bas*, with a careless superiority. But by this time he had learned to know that Paolo was on some things a much better authority than himself, and that, though he might be trivial and absurd on questions which Englishmen consider themselves judges of, yet there were other matters, chiefly touching his own countrymen, which he knew better than any Englishman. To have attained to this conviction was in a way a moral advance for Harry, who formerly had looked down upon "foreigners," not thinking them worth the trouble of studying, or esteeming the knowledge which was only concerned with them and their ways. He had no opportunity of speaking to Paolo till dinner. They were both of them faithful, more or less, to the *table-d'hôte* at the Leone, where they had first become friends: but Harry's attendance there now was irregular, and when he entered the dining-room Paolo's face became radiant with pleasure. He seized his friend's arm and gave it a squeeze of satisfaction.

"But without doubt you go somewhere in the evening?" he said, with a mixture of wistfulness and triumphant pride. He was proud of Harry's *succès* in society; but yet to have so little of him

pained the faithful soul. He had bettered his English, but perhaps he had not much improved his happiness by his devotion to this stranger, to whom he had been so useful. Harry gave him very little of his company, and no demonstration of affection in return for his love.

"No; I want you to come to my rooms, Paolo. I want to consult you about something—we'll have some coffee brought up there, and we'll have a talk."

"Benissimo!" said Paolo, glowing with pleasure. "However," he added with simplicity, "there is little that I can instruct you in now. You know all—you are better as me. But if there is any case that is hard to understand ——"

"You make me ashamed of myself," said Harry; "do you really think I never want to see you but when I have something to ask? I don't think I am quite so bad as that. Of course I have picked your brains constantly; but still I am not so bad as that."

At this Paolo was up in arms, as if some terrible accusation had been brought against him.

"Pardon, pardon, Amico," he said. "Do you think I am finding fault? do you think I make myself a censure over you (he meant censor, but this was unimportant)? It is all otherwise. To

see you go into society makes me pleasure—the grandest pleasure. If not me, it is my friend—it is as good—better, as to go myself. You pick my brains—*bene*! my brains is glad to be pick."

"I think you are the best fellow in the world," Harry said, "and I am a beast always to take advantage of you—to come to you whenever I want you."

"What then is a friend?" said Paolo, with that glistening of the eyes which Harry was always afraid of. And then the excellent fellow suppressed himself, knowing Harry's objections to a scene. "I am a duffare," he said, with a laugh, "if there is something I can do that makes me glad."

"I want your advice, Paolo," said Harry; "it is nothing about business; it is is not information I want from you. I am in a diffculty—I am in trouble—and I want your advice."

"In troouble!" Paolo's face grew long, long as his arm; his lively imagination harped at various cases of "troouble" he had known: defalcations at the office, difficulties about money, fallings into temptation. His countenance clouded with anxiety and alarm. "Amico," he said, "I am all at your disposition—all at your disposition! Troouble! let us not lose the time. That turns me

the stomach, as you say. Thanks, thanks, Antonio; but take it away—I cannot more eat."

"That's nonsense, old fellow," said Harry, plying his own knife and fork vigorously, "you see it don't take away my appetite. Come, eat your dinner. I've not been going to the bad, if that's what you think, you goose,"

"Go-ose? I am willing to be goose," said Paolo, "if it's all right; not anything in the bureau? not with accounts, or money, or nothing of the sort? Benissimo?—then I will have some of that dish, Antonio, and it is all right."

"I wonder what you take me for," said Harry, offended. "Money! do you think I am that sort? No, no, Paolo. When you've finished your dinner—you have eaten nothing but that maccaroni—we'll go to my rooms and talk it over. It is something about myself."

It was all Harry could do after this to persuade his friend not to gobble up everything that was offered to him in his anxiety to get his meal over. Paolo could not contain his curiosity and eager interest. He almost dragged his friend along the street when dinner was concluded, and clambered the long staircase like a cat, in his eagerness to know what Harry's difficulty was, and to proceed immediately to smooth it over and ravel it out.

CHAPTER X.

PAOLO'S ADVICE.

THE room was large, and low, and white. There was a little balcony hanging from the windows; the usual bright-coloured pattern on the walls; the usual sofa and chairs, and little rug on the tiled floor. Harry had not taken any particular care of his room or its decoration. The lamp burned with three little clear tongues of flame in the centre of the scene. Paolo sat in a large chair, thrown back, his little intelligent, intent face showing from the dark background; his feet flicking in front of him. As for Harry, he was too shy to sit still and tell his story under the light of his friend's large, eager eyes, which leaped at the words before they were said. He was walking about from one end of the

room to the other. On the table was the little coffee-pot, the thick, white cups upon a tray. Harry did not despise black coffee now. Sometimes he came up to the table, and poured it out and swallowed it hastily; while all the time Paolo, swinging his foot in front of him, and leaning back in his chair, never took from him his eager black eyes.

"And the short and the long of it," said Harry, "is that I have fallen in love." He turned his back to his companion as he spoke, and stood looking out from the open window. "I have been about the house so much, and seen the young lady so often, that without thinking, and without meaning it, I have just fallen in love. Jove! what a beautiful night it is!" said Harry; "I never saw the stars so bright: that's just the position of affairs. She is quite out of my rank, I know, as impossible as the stars themselves: but that's how it is."

"Fallen—in lofe?" Paolo mused for a moment over the words. "It is droll, the English way of speaking. Is it then a deep, or a sea, or a precipice, that you—fall."

"Oh, don't bother," cried Harry. "To be sure it is a deep, and a sea, and a precipice. Why,

every fool knows that. You are never thinking of anything of the sort, going along quite quietly, minding your own business—when all in a moment down you go squash, and there's no help for you any more."

Paolo smiled a benevolent but somewhat tremulous smile.

"The young lady is very beautiful—that goes without saying," he said. "I had thought you would have taken your freedom a little longer, and you wish to marry and range yourself. *Bene!* it will be what you call all oop with me," said Paolo, with a slight quiver; "a wife—that goes not along with a friend—not a friend of the heart like me. It makes a beginning to many things, but also to some an end."

"Good gracious!" cried Harry, "do you mean to say you don't understand me? Am I in a condition to marry? I have not a penny. I have my little salary, and that is all. If I could jump up and ask her to marry me, above-board in our English way, do you think I'd ask any advice about it? I don't want you to tell me she's nice, I know that myself a great deal better than you could tell me. It is just because I can't marry, and ought to hold my tongue and never say a

a word about it—and yet can't help seeing her continually, that I don't know what to do."

Paolo looked at him with a still more wistful, anxious face. He was terribly perplexed. There was an alternative which was not at all impossible to his imagination; but having on many occasions already come in contact forcibly with the English mind, as represented in Harry, he was afraid to state or refer to the other side of the question, which nevertheless was not at all terrible to himself. He looked very wistfully and earnestly in his friend's face, trying hard to read and make out what was in it. What was in it? Did he mean ——? Paolo could not tell whether he might venture to say what he would have said easily enough to many of his other friends.

"You would then—that understands itself; but to put it into words, above all with an English what you call Puritano—like you; you would then—make a little arrangement—you would then propose—without going to church."

"Eh?" said Harry. He turned round upon his friend with blazing eyes. "Eh?" The monosyllable was more terrible than a whole chapter of invectives. Astonishment, non-comprehension,

yet at the same time alarmed and furious understanding were in it. Paolo, who was a miracle of quick intelligence, saw all that was in Harry's look almost before he himself was conscious of it, and he mended his indiscretion with the rapidity of lightning.

"I have make a mistake." he said. "I have not understood. It is so sudden, I had no preparation. If you will perhaps tell me again?"

Harry stared with wide open eyes like a bull, not quite knowing whether to charge an adversary, or to turn away from an insignificant intruder. The more peaceable impulse prevailed. He had stood still gazing at Paolo, who, mentally trembling, though he put the best face he could outwardly upon the matter, met his friend's gaze with a deprecating smile. After a minute he resumed his pacing about the floor.

"I see you don't understand," he said, with something between a groan and a sigh. "Well then, I'll try again. Here are the circumstances. I am admitted to the house, a very nice house, in which I am very happy. The father puts faith in me; he trusts me like a friend; the young lady is—everything that is nice. Well! don't you see? like a fool, instead of keeping quiet and

enjoying all this, like a fool I have gone and fallen in love with her. And last night I was as near betraying myself—— Now if I go on I'll be more and more tempted to betray myself. I can't keep away from the house—it is not possible. I can't offer to the young lady because I am not good enough for her, and I have no money. Now what am I to do?"

"You were at the house of the Signor Vice-Consul last night?"

"Never mind where I was," said Harry sharply, "tell me what I am to do."

"It would be well, amico mio, that your confidence was more great, or none at all," said Paolo. "If it should happen that I possessed the acquaintance of the father and the daughter ——" There was a little incipient smile upon his lip that drove Harry wild.

"I believe you think badly of every woman," he cried; "all the worse for you if you do. I am not going to make any confidences of that sort. Look here—you know more about society than I do. You know how people are expected to behave here. Ought I just to cut the whole concern, though I don't want to—and take myself off?"

Harry came to a sudden stop in front of his friend when he asked this question, and, for his part, Paolo almost screamed with alarm.

"Cut—the whole concern? That is to go away?"

"To go away," said Harry, discharging all the breath out of his capacious chest in one great sigh, and throwing himself into the second great chair opposite Paolo. His friend grew pale; his olive cheeks were blanched; the lids were puckered round his anxious and almost despairing eyes.

"That is what you must not do—that is what you shall not do! It is not permitted to throw away, to make such a sacrifice," cried Paolo, with a rapid succession of phrases, one broken sentence hurrying upon another. "No, no, no, no. Imagine to yourself that all goes so well. The world regards you with so favourable eyes; you are everywhere received, everywhere received!—a favourite, Isaack mio. But no, no; this must not be—for a girl—for a promise—for a caprice, you will not throw away your career."

Harry did not say anything. He lay back drearily in his chair, his whole person making one oblique line from his head, which rested on

the back of the chair, to the feet stretched out on the floor. He was not likely to talk about his career, but he felt to the bottom of his heart the dismal alternative: to go away; to throw up everything; to resign himself to another new and much less favourable beginning. His new start in Leghorn had been made in circumstances so extraordinarily favourable that they looked like a romance, and he himself could scarcely believe them true—all the more reason why he should not presume now upon the hospitality of the house which had taken him in; but he never could by any possibility hope for such another piece of good fortune. In all this he put Rita herself out of the question. Perhaps he did not feel, as a lover sometimes does, as if his entire life was involved in her acceptance of him. He was a sober-minded young man. It would cost him a great wrench, it would take the colour and the pleasure out of his life if he were banished from the happy rooms in which she reigned. But yet, honour requiring it, he could do this and live; he was not afraid of himself so far. But how to continue here in the enjoyment of his other advantages and withdraw from the house in which he had been received so kindly, he did

not know. It would be impossible without explanations, and what explanation could he give?

"Look you 'ere," said Paolo, rising in his turn, taking advantage of all the devices of oratory to move his friend, "lofe, that is one thing; life, that is another. For a capriccio I say nothing. We all have such; by times it will seem as though you live not but in possession of the object; but after, that will pass, and you will laugh, and all will go on as before."

"Hold your tongue; you don't know anything about it," said Harry, with a contemptuous wave of the hand.

"I have had my experiences like another," said Paolo, mildly. "I am not an ignorant. It is for a moment you suffer, you think all is ovare. But—oh, bah!—when it is ovare so many things remain. There is the bureau," said Paolo, counting on his fingers, "there are the events of the day; there is the table—for you must always eat; there is society—which is made," he added sententiously, "of other objects. In brief, amico mio, there is to live. That must be done all the same. For the moment it may be hard—but sooner or later the time of calm will arrive—What then? If it be certain that an hour will

come when you will have had enough, when you will become weary——"

Harry sat up in his chair. "What are you talking about?" he said.

With his honest English imagination he did not know what the other meant. He had never read a French novel in his life (he could not, indeed, if he had wished), nor any English ones of that sort. According to him, when a man "fell in love" it was with the intention of marrying the girl he loved, and living happy ever after. The idea that it would last only for so long, and that there would come a time when you would have enough, and be weary—a moment which must arrive sooner or later—was such a thing as had no meaning to him. Paolo turned, too, when his friend said this, and gazed at him, startled and wondering. Suddenly the little Italian became aware that he was speaking another language, a tongue unknown to Harry. He did not know Harry's tongue so far as this went, but being very quick and intelligent he perceived at once that it was not the same as his, and that in speaking as he did he had completely missed Harry's comprehension. This took away from him the power of speech. How was he to find out Harry's

language? They remained for a full minute thus, baffled each by each, gazing at each other: Paolo, small and keen, trying hard to make his friend out; Harry, large, obtuse, confused, wondering what on heaven and earth this strange little being could mean.

"Look here," he said at last, "I'm English, you know. I don't follow you a bit. Perhaps you're too refined, and all that. You don't fathom my difficulty, and I don't understand in the least what you mean. Here's what I want: just listen. I am fond of a girl, but I daren't tell her I'm fond of her, because you know I have nothing to marry on, and I am not such a cur as to ask her to bury herself up for years waiting for me; and besides, it wouldn't be handsome to her father, who has been very kind to me. What am I to do? Ought I to go right away? I don't want to do that. Or can you tell me how I'm to put a padlock on my tongue, and go on seeing her, and never betray myself? No, by Jove! I don't think I am strong enough for that."

"There is one thing will make it more easy," said Paolo—he had dived deep into the records of his own experience to find precedents, but he found nothing which could throw any light upon

so strange a case, and he was now casting about blindly for something to say—"there is one thing. This lady, this Signorina—is she then—what shall you call it? disposed to respond to you?"

Harry's face grew crimson. He gave a rapid glance back upon all their intercourse. He seemed to see Rita's unconscious, tranquil face. Even when he had made that foolish speech about taking her to England she had been moved not a hair's breadth. She had taken it with perfect calm, as one who had never thought upon the subject might quite well do. "I don't think so," he said, quickly, not looking his friend in the face.

"Then it is moche more easy," said Paolo "There is nothing to do, amico mio, but to be silent—what you call hold your tongue: and all will be ovare. When the lady will respond it is different—when she will give you a glance, a smile, a permission to say what perhaps ought not to be said."

"There is nothing of the kind in the whole business," said Harry, bluntly; "you are thinking of your intrigues, and all that Italian nonsense. English girls don't understand it any more than I do."

"Then the Signorina—is English?" Paolo ven-

tured here to give vent to a little laugh. "But you must not be too secure that she understands no more than you. Perhaps there is in the lady a little Italian blood!"

"Paolo," said Harry, "you have the most unreasonable, idiotic, offensive prejudice against ——"

And here he paused—for had he not been careful all this time to keep in the background the name of the lady? He stopped, and he looked at Paolo with curious, anxious, defiant eyes."

Paolo would have laughed had he dared: but he did not venture to laugh. It was too serious. "I have no prejudice," he said. "It may be that I think a little in Italian, one cannot help one's thoughts. But then why will you ask me? If the lady is indifferent where then is the difficulty of to hold your tongue? But if that is otherwise—listen. The papa, it is to him one speaks when it is of marriage. Love, that is another thing. You do not understand, amico," said Paolo, with a plaintive tone, "the difference. There is great difference. They are two things all-together. Marriage," once more he counted upon his fingers, "that will mean the papa; love —ah! that will mean the moment, the opportunity, the response."

To these last words Harry paid no attention. He scarcely heard them. But the others seemed to throw a sudden light upon the whole subject. He rose up again and resumed his promenade about the room, biting his nails and knitting his brows. "By Jove," he said, at last, "Paul-o, you're not half such a foolish little beggar as you look. That is the thing to do. I wonder I never thought of it myself. To be sure, that's the thing to do."

"What is the thing to do?" Paolo asked, bewildered. But his friend made him no direct answer. After a good deal more of that pacing up and down, he came back and patted his counsellor on the back so vigorously that he almost took away Paolo's breath.

"That is the very thing," Harry said. "You are a clever little beggar after all. I should never have hit it out all by myself; but I see now, it's the right thing to do. Not too easy though; I can't say that I shall like it a bit; but one can see in a moment that it's the right thing to do."

"What is the right thing?" Paolo asked again; but he got no reply. Harry fell a-musing as he sometimes did, letting the little Italian go on with talk, to which his friend paid no attention;

and afterwards he walked with Paolo to his rooms, paying just as little regard to what he said. It was another clear, starlight night, soft and cool as the nights are in an Italian spring. There was no chill to freeze the blood; but all was balmy and soft. He went along the streets with their high houses reaching almost up to the sky, looking up to the narrow lane of radiant blue above, all living and sweet with stars. He thought his problem over again, going step by step over the same way which he had traversed before—and it seemed to him that he had at last found the true and the only solution. He could not withdraw himself from the Vice-Consul's house without an explanation; that would be impossible; therefore the only thing to be done was to go to the Vice-Consul himself, and tell him how the case stood. "I cannot be sure of myself if I go on seeing her every day; therefore I must give up seeing her every day, and you must know why." Probably he would not tell his story so briefly as this; there would be explanations to give, and many digressions probably from the main theme; but that in effect would be all that Harry would have to say; and certainly it was the right thing to do. He took it for granted that Paolo had suggested it,

though in reality it was an alternative of a much less satisfactory kind that Paolo had suggested; but all the rest that he had said vanished from Harry's practical mind, leaving this one piece of advice behind, and no more. Paolo was no fool, though his way of thinking might not be much like an Englishman's. Englishmen did not go to the father first, but to the daughter, to know what their chances were; but for once in a way the other mode was the best. He took a long walk after he left his friend, traversing all the streets which now he knew so well, and further still to where the salt air of the sea blew in his face, and refreshed his soul. He would not trifle with the occasion, but go at once to-morrow and get it off his mind. So he said to himself. And he came home past the house from which he was henceforward to be banished. It was late, and the sitting-rooms were all dark; but Harry knew that a little light in one window indicated Rita's room—probably the faint little *veilleuse* which watched over her sleep; and that in another was the lamp by which the Vice-Consul was smoking his last cigar. He stood and looked piteously at the house. It had been a kind of home to him, in one way more than his own home had ever been.

Standing outside in the night it appeared beautiful to him, as never house had appeared before. He had not appreciated the *bric-à-brac*, or known what to say about the pictures; but now each article of the furniture suddenly appeared to him in a new light. It was all beautiful; it was such a place as a palace might be—a house for a queen; and to think that he had almost lived in it for so long, and that now he was to enter there no more! Harry was not like the Peri at the gate of Paradise; he had a still more pathetic, a heart-rending sense of loss. He had been there yesterday; but he was not to be there again perhaps for ever. Why should he go away? and yet he must go away; he must keep himself at a distance from those dear doors. Slowly there gathered in his eyes a painful dew; it did not fall in tears, which he would have scorned himself for shedding, but it blurred and magnified all he saw. Yesterday so much at home, so familiar in the place, to-morrow with no entrance possible to him any more! and all by no fault of his or anyone's; by no levity on *her* part, or presumption on his; all unawares, no one thinking of any danger. It seemed to Harry, standing outside there, as if there was something very hard in such a wayward

accident of fate, as if some malign spirit must have taken pleasure in twisting the threads wrongly; in making trouble out of the most innocent situations in life. He had never meant to go further than liking—no one could help going as far as liking; but the unlucky fellow, without meaning it, had taken the step farther, and loved; and now all his card-castle of happiness had tumbled down, and everything was over. There was nothing wrong in it—no fault in it one way or another: and yet a great many faults would have produced less confusion and pain.

CHAPTER XI.

WITH HER FATHER.

NEXT morning Harry went to the office with an air of resolution about him which no one could have mistaken. He thought the others looked at him curiously with investigating eyes, which, indeed, was true enough; for his predecessor there never could make out how it was that the stranger had gained so much interest with the Consul, and Paolo, who was the only other person present, was full of the most anxious wonder and suspense. But, as it happened, Harry was kept so fully occupied all day that he could not say a word to the Vice-Consul, and his air of resolution and sense of being wound up for a great crisis, came to nothing. But he did not go near the Consulate in the evening. Had things been in their ordinary course he

would, in the most natural way, and, indeed, with a semblance of necessity, have proceeded there to consult Mr. Bonamy about some matter of business, or to ask directions from him. But he forbore. He sat in his own rooms all the evening, feeling it unutterably long, trying to amuse himself with reading, and finding very little amusement in that somewhat unwonted exercise. He had been "reading up," with a great deal of industry and some interest, books which he had heard discussed in the Vice-Consul's house, and in this way had at least procured a good deal of information, the advantage of which was evident. But Harry had not read for enjoyment, and now that things had come to this pass, and that he was about to be compelled to give up the society of the Bonamys, and lose the gratification of pleasing Rita, it seemed to his practical mind that there was no great reason for continuing those studies. It was quite likely that he never would live among such people again, and why should he take so much trouble—trouble taken with the idea of pleasing them? it was no longer worth his while. He was driven back to his books indeed by the tedium of the long, unoccupied evening, for he had no heart

to go out, to be waylaid by Paolo, and have questions put to him which he would find it very difficult to answer. But he yawned a great deal, and went to bed very early, and slept badly in consequence, tossing about for two hours and hearing the melancholy clocks peal. Next day he was resolved he must speak. Indeed, it would be indispensable that he should, as it was the day on which Rita received, and he had never yet been absent from her drawing-room on that special evening. He had a good opportunity this time, for the Vice-Consul called for him as soon as he appeared after his luncheon, and bade him bring certain papers to be examined. "I quite expected you to have brought them last night," Mr. Bonamy said. "For two nights we have not seen you, Oliver. Rita was asking me to-day whether you were ill. I hope you are not ill. There's no fever here that I know of; still it is always well to take care."

"I am not ill, Sir," said Harry, colouring high, and then growing pale; "but there was another reason. I should like to speak to you for a few minutes, about myself, if you could spare the time."

"Certainly I can spare you the time," said the

Vice-Consul, readily; "but not now, you know. Come to me again as soon as the office is closed. Shall we talk your business over here, or in the house?"

"Here, if you please," said Harry.

"Here be it, then. Do you know you excite my curiosity? you look so serious. But I hope it's nothing disagreeable, nothing to interfere with our alliance?" said the Vice-Consul, good-humouredly. He thought he knew exactly what it was. No doubt the family had found him out, and Harry was about to be recalled to its bosom. This would give Mr. Bonamy himself a little regret, and he could understand that to leave a place where everybody had been kind to him would be a sort of trial to the young man; but at the same time it was far better for him that he should be reconciled to his family. So he went through his business with a little gentle interest, looking forward to the *éclaircissement*. It was like the third volume of a novel to the Vice-Consul, and even something more than that, more than the mere end of a story which had interested him—for it would also settle various questions in his mind, and prove if he had been right or not in the instantaneous opinion which he had

formed about Harry's concerns. He felt quite sure that he would prove to have been right. By the time Harry returned to him, after the work of the afternoon was done, he had made out within himself quite what the scene was to be. The young man would say: "My father is here;" or "My brother is here," as might be; and a hale, hearty old country gentleman, or a young, ruddy, fresh-coloured youth, like Harry himself, would be brought in and presented to him, and he would give himself the gratification of saying, "This is precisely how I expected it would be; I have been looking for you this past year daily, though I had no notion who you were." When Harry came back with the same face of serious excitement the Consul almost laughed. "Bring them in, bring them in," he said, "I have nothing to say against you. You need not be afraid that I will give you a bad character." Harry looked at him with that look of blank astonishment which so often turns into lofty superiority and disapproval of their seniors' folly in youthful eyes.

"Bring—whom in?" he said.

"Your people, to be sure, my dear Oliver. Come, Oliver, I am not an old wife; you can't conceal it from me."

"I know nothing about my people," said Harry, hastily; "I have nothing more to say about them than I have already told you. Things are exactly as they were between them and me. What I have got to tell you is a very different sort of thing. But you will see by it, at least, Sir, that I have no wish to conceal anything from you."

"Bless my soul!" said the Vice-Consul, "what's the matter? Have you got into any scrape? Have you come in contact with the police? What is the matter, my boy?"

"It is nothing outside of this house, Sir," Harry said, with a grave smile; "the police have got nothing to say to it. If it is a scrape it is one I have got myself into, and I must get myself out of it. Anyhow, it is not likely to hurt anybody but myself," and here, in spite of all his precautions, his lip quivered a little. At this moment, the very worst for such a strong wave of feeling, it suddenly came over him what a tremendous change it would be, and how much it would hurt himself—if nobody else.

"You alarm me," said Mr. Bonamy, growing grave in his turn. "My dear fellow, I hope you feel that I take an interest in everything that con-

cerns you, and that you may safely confide in me——"

"Yes, Sir, I am sure of that," said Harry; and then he added; "all the more that it concerns you too."

Mr. Bonamy pushed away his chair from the table, opened his eyes wide, and looked at Harry as if he thought him mad.

"I can't come to your house any more, Sir," said Harry, "that's what I wanted to tell you. I've enjoyed it very much, and it has done me more good than anything else in my life—but I ought not to do it, and I can't do it any longer. I hope you won't think I am an ungrateful cur; I don't think I am that. But I must give it up, Sir, and I hope you'll excuse me for it. I'd rather not say any more."

"Oliver," said the Vice-Consul, greatly disturbed, "what is the meaning of this? Do you mean there is something in your past—something in your character and actions that makes you unfit to be my visitor? I have always trusted in your honour. If it's that, and your conscience has been quickened to find it out, of course I have nothing more to say."

"It's not that," said Harry, bluntly. "I am

not afraid of my conscience. It says as much to me, I suppose, as to other people; but you might hear all it says and welcome. There is nothing against my character here or elsewhere. You know as much harm of me as there is to know."

"I know no harm of you," said the Vice-Consul. "Come, come, don't alarm me. If you find we don't suit you—though by your manner I should never have guessed it—why, then, give us up, my fine fellow, and there's no more to be said."

Harry laughed a somewhat tremulous laugh.

"I should think you did suit me," he said. "I don't believe I was ever half so happy before."

"Then, in the name of wonder, what does this mean?" the Vice-Consul cried.

Harry cleared his throat; his lips were beginning to get parched and his throat was dry.

"Did you never hear, Sir," he said, abruptly, "of a fellow falling in love—with a girl he'd no business to fall in love with?"

Mr. Bonamy half rose out of his chair, then changed his mind and dropped back again. His own face became suffused with colour. A sudden exclamation came from his lips it spite of himself.

"Is this what has happened to you?" he said.

"This is what has happened to me," said

Harry. "I'm very sorry—nobody can be more sorry—it shuts me out from a great deal I had got to be proud of, and happy in. I wish I had made any blunder in the world rather than this; but it's done, and I can't help it. So the only thing I have got to do now is—— well, either to stay away from the house, or to go away altogether, as you think best."

"I suppose then that at my house you run the risk," said the Vice-Consul, with suspicious breaks in his words, either of doubt or excitement, "of meeting—the young lady?"

Harry did not say a word; but he looked at him fixedly, with a deep colour flaming over his face. At this the Vice-Consul gazed at him with an alarmed expression, gradually catching fire too.

"You don't mean to say ——?" he cried, and then he was silent, and there ensued a confused and uncomfortable pause.

"Yes, Sir," said Harry. He had looked his chief in the face all this time; but now he avoided the other's eye, "that is just how it stands. I told you it was not my fault. I never thought of such a thing. It never," he said, putting out his hand to a bundle of papers upon the table by which he was standing,

and turning them vaguely over and over, "it never—happened to me before."

When the Vice-Consul looked at him standing there, with that look of half-astonished simplicity on his face, and those artless words on his lips, it was all he could do to keep in an outburst of laughter. He thought he had never come in contact with so simple-minded, and candid, and honourable a fellow. He was startled and alarmed, and made uneasy by his confession; but yet he had the greatest desire to laugh. Yet why should he laugh? it was serious enough; his lively mind jumped to the possibility that his Rita might prefer this young stranger to himself. It would be an extraordinary choice, he could not but think; but yet, alas! that was how things often were in this strange world. A girl would prefer a man she had seen three or four times in a ball-room, to the father whose very existence she was; and nobody would be surprised at it; it was the course of nature; it was the way of the world. This idea chilled and alarmed him to the bottom of his heart; but yet he could hardly help laughing at Harry and his perturbed air. "I never thought of such a thing—it never happened before." The

Consul was almost too much amused to take in the seriousness of the event.

"I presume you have said nothing to her," he said at last, looking portentously serious by reason of the inclination to untimely mirth, which he had to subdue.

"That is just the thing," cried Harry, rousing up from his bashful pre-occupation. "No, I have not spoken—what you would call speaking; but on Monday night I just dropped a word——"

"Good Lord!" cried the Vice-Consul. He had no longer any inclination to laugh; what he was disposed to do was to take the young fellow by the throat.

"You can't be more frightened than I was," said Harry, ingenuously. "It was by that I found out. Of course I knew I admired—*her* more than anybody I had ever seen; but I had no more notion how far it had gone—— and then like a fool I began to speak of going home to England, and how I was sure I could take her all safe if she would go with me. That was all: I assure you that was all," cried Harry, discomposed by Mr. Bonamy's look and manner. He was alarmed by this look: the Vice-Consul had risen up, trembling with wrath.

"I would like to know," he cried, "what more you could have said!—what more could you wish to say? And this is what you call love! To betray my child; to propose death to her—death! Oh, boy, boy, do you know what you are doing in your folly and simplicity; beguiling her to her death, and me to —— Good God! why should I always be such a fool? Why did I have this fellow here?"

"You are judging me too harshly, Sir," cried Harry; "you think it was a great deal worse than really happened. She never took any notice of it; it hadn't the least meaning to her. She asked me did I know something—some physic I suppose," Harry said, in a kind of parenthesis, with disdain—"that would make it safe. That was all she thought of it; but as for me, as soon as I had said it I came to myself. I've had a dreadful time of it since," he added once more, with that air of downright sincerity and solemnity which made the Vice-Consul wish to smile. "I've turned over every kind of plan in my mind. Sometimes I've thought of going right away; but that seemed hard, too, when I had just got settled here. And at the last the right thing seemed just to come and tell you. Of course I

put myself in your hands. I'll do whatever you think it proper I should do: give up the office; go away from the town; anything you please. I don't want to leave you—or her," cried Harry, "God knows! you have been so kind to me."

And then the Vice-Consul, hearing the young fellow's voice falter, and seeing that he kept his eyes down to conceal the water that had got into them, felt a little knot in his throat too, and was melted in spite of himself.

"Oliver," he said, "I don't want to be hard upon you. You said she took no notice—that is just like her; she is no coquette, my girl; she is very innocent. I daresay it never occurred to her that you meant anything."

"I don't think it did, Sir," Harry said eagerly. Of course he had no clue to Rita's retirement to her own room, or the amused consideration she gave to the subject there.

"I don't want to be hard upon you," Mr. Bonamy repeated, "if that is the case. Answer me one more thing, Oliver, and answer it on your honour. Have you any reason to think (that I should have to put such a question?) that if you had spoken out more plainly, she—— Heavens! I can't put it into words."

"How could I," cried Harry, almost provoked, "have reason to think anything about it, when I never even suspected myself? It was that word that opened my eyes."

And then there was another pause. Harry stood turning over and over that bundle of papers. He looked at them as if he thought they contained some secret of state He took them in his hand as if anxious to know how many ounces they weighed. His face wore a look of the gravest stolid seriousness. He had now withdrawn from the consideration of his duty, or what he ought to do, and put it into another person's hands. He was freed of the responsibility, and he had only to wait now to see what he should be told to do.

Then once more a sense of the humour of the situation intruded upon its seriousness in the Vice-Consul's eyes. His anger and alarm were quenched in a sense of the absolute simplicity and honesty of the culprit, and a hope that no harm had been done. Mr. Bonamy began to breathe freely again, even to smile.

"Sit down," he said, "and let us talk this over. I don't blame you, Oliver. I can understand that you were not seriously to blame; and, if no

harm is done—I suppose you will promise me that it shall not occur again."

"Well, Sir," said Harry, "that is just what I should like to be able to do; but seeing I was such a fool as to do it once, how can I tell that I may not be a greater fool again? especially as then I did not know anything about it, whereas I know all about it now."

"That is just the reason," said Mr. Bonamy. "Now you are on your guard, and you will know when to be watchful. I can't give you permission to make love to—my daughter, Oliver. I suppose you did not expect I could?"

"Oh, no," cried Harry, eagerly; "not in the least. I could not, of course, even if you did, for I have no money. I could no more marry than I could fly."

"Marry!" cried the Vice-Consul. The young man said the word in the most matter-of-fact way, but it took away the other's breath. "Do you know what you are doing?" he cried; "you are putting a knife to my throat. Marry! That means that if you could you would break up this home of mine in which you confess you have been received so kindly. You would rob me of all I have. You would take from me everything

that makes life precious. For what, young man, for what? Because you admire a pretty face! You don't know any more of her—I am not sure that you are able to appreciate any more of her. But she is everything in the world—she is all that makes life worth living—to me."

Harry threw down the bundle of papers and looked across the table with the intensest astonishment. "Do you mean," he said, "that you don't intend her ever to be married at all? Is nobody to have the chance? Is she always to be kept up in one place, and never to settle, nor have her own choice and her own life?"

Mr. Bonamy felt as if he were being stoned—one solid, heavy fact tossed at him after another; and looked at his questioner with a sort of gasp between the blows. He faltered after a while, "She is very young. She has everything that her heart can desire. Why should she not be content, at least for years to come, in her father's house?"

"I always understood, Sir," said Harry, with his usual straightforwardness, "that the right thing for girls was to marry when they were young, and that parents were supposed to wish it."

"To scheme for it, perhaps?" said Mr. Bonamy, furiously, "and put out all sorts of snares to catch young fellows like you—eh? To lay traps for you, and lead you on, and give you encouragement and opportunity, and so forth? Perhaps you think that's what I've been doing—eh? God forgive me," he said, "in my day I've said that sort of thing, and believed it myself; I've sneered and scoffed like the rest—and now I've got my punishment. You think there is nothing so fine for a girl as to get married—eh?"

Harry was struck with consternation by this attack; but yet, feeling that he had right on his side, he stood his ground. "I am not saying anything about *you*, Sir," he said, "but surely it is thought the best thing that could happen. I've always heard it. Fathers and mothers, you know, Sir, don't generally live as long as their children—at least, that is what is supposed—and they like to see their daughters settled, don't they, before they die?"

This was what the French would call a brutal speech—for, in the first place, it was true; and then Mr. Bonamy was at an age which seemed old to Harry, but rather young than otherwise to himself, and he was not at all pleased to have

it taken for granted that he must shortly be going to die. Yes, of course Rita would outlive him, would live long, he hoped, after him; but still the idea that there was any need to marry her off in haste, lest he might die and leave her before she was—settled, was most repugnant to him; it went to his heart, wounding him with a possibility which he had no desire to think of; and it made him hot and angry, as if it had been a personal insult. No one likes to be told that he has come to a period of life at which it is more likely than otherwise that he will shortly die, and that it is very necessary to take precautions against that event. It was all he could do to keep from bursting out upon Harry, crushing him with a bitter rejoinder. He to address his benefactor thus! He to speak in this tone to the man who had received him when nobody else would, who had lifted him out of all the difficulties of a stranger, and opened not only his office, which gave him bread, but his house, which gave him friends, and position, and everything a young man could wish for! These words were rushing to Mr. Bonamy's lips, when fortunately a sense of his personal dignity, and of the impropriety of any such demonstration, came in

and stopped him. Harry's speech, after all, was good common sense, just the sort of thing that everybody says; the world was on that side of the question. Perhaps prudence and the foresight which love itself ought to possess was on that side too. So he was silent, repressing the first instinct of reply. When he was able to do it, he answered with as much self-possession as he could muster.

"I admire your prudence, Mr. Oliver. I hope you will always see your own duties with the same clearness which you display about those of others; and I have no doubt you are quite right; but it is a question which I don't care to discuss. Let me say, before we finish this talk, that I think you have behaved very honourably, and as a gentleman should; and I quite accept your reason for coming to my house much less frequently. I will make your excuses to my daughter; and nothing that has passed need make any difference in our official relations," he added, looking up with a smile that was sharp and cold, not like his usual sunshine, "in that respect there is no possible reason why everything should not go on as before."

"Very well, Sir," said Harry, getting up with

some confusion. The conversation had been going on so long, and so much less indignation than he expected had been in the Vice-Consul's air at the beginning, that this sudden sentence confounded him. He was quite ready, when he began, to be taken at his word; but somehow he was not now so ready; the bitterness had seemed to be past, and he had hoped that the indulgent and fatherly friend before him would have found some way by which he should still be permitted to come and go. But now all at once Harry found himself, in his own words, "shut up," and had nothing to do but to stumble to his feet as quickly as he could, and take himself off, much subdued and astonished, to his desk in the outer office—where he gave his mind to his business, not too clearly, but with as much devotion as was practicable, for the rest of the day.

CHAPTER XII.

RITA'S OPINION.

THESE two men, however, though they were disposed to think themselves the chief, or, indeed, only persons concerned, were by no means the masters of the situation, as they supposed. Rita took Harry's absence from her drawing-room quite lightly at first, so lightly that her father's mind was entirely relieved. He had been afraid that her astonishment, if nothing else, would have been great, and that she would have asked him a hundred questions—questions which it might have given him some trouble to answer. But she took it quite quietly, and said nothing about it for a week or two, till the Vice-Consul was of opinion that all danger was passed. About this time, however, Rita, by one of those

accidents which occur perversely to heighten the embarrassment of every domestic crisis, met Harry suddenly on one of her walks, coming upon him round a corner without any warning to either party. Her usual attendant, Benedetta, was with the young lady, who looked up brightly with surprise and pleasure, and held out her hand.

"What has become of you all this time?" she said, in her kind, soft voice.

On Harry, for his part, the effect of so suddenly coming in sight of her, and of her frank accost, was too remarkable to escape Rita's quick eye. He fell backward a step, swerved from his course, gave a glance round him, as if in search of some way of escape, then, seeing none, took her offered hand gingerly, just touched and dropped it, his face flushing crimson, his voice faltering.

"Oh, I am very well, thank you," was the answer he made; and then stood and stared at her for a moment, and, without replying to any of her questions, went on again confusedly, leaving her standing still gazing after him in a state of mingled dismay and consternation.

"What can have happened to him?" Rita said to herself, unconsciously aloud; and "I think

the gentleman must be mad," said tranquilly the good Benedetta, who thought the English were all a little insane, and that it was nothing much out of the way. But that evening when dinner was over it was the Vice-Consul's turn to be undeceived.

"Papa," said Rita, suddenly (she had let him have his dinner first, which showed consideration), "what is the matter with Mr. Oliver?"

The Vice-Consul was like a ship at sea, into whose innocent hulk a sudden broadside is poured without any sort of warning; he dipped his sails, so to speak, all his timbers thrilled and shivered. He had not been in the least prepared for any such assault.

"Oliver?" he said, trying to put on an exaggerated look of innocence, "Oliver? what's the matter with him? What should be the matter with him? He is all right for anything I know."

"He is not all right," said Rita; "he has not been here for a fortnight, he who used to come almost every night; and you should have seen him when I met him to-day; I thought he would have run away. He tried it, I declare. He looked all round to see if he could not make his

escape, and when I cried out, 'What has become of you?' he said, 'Very well, thank you!' Was there ever anything so absurd? I like him for that, he is so English, and so absurd."

"I don't see anything absurd about it," said the Vice-Consul, with a very grave countenance.

"Don't you, papa? you are growing dull, you have been very dull for some time back. Since Mr. Oliver ran away! Perhaps it is because of that. Perhaps it is the same thing that has affected you both."

"You pay me a high compliment," said Mr. Bonamy, nettled, "to think that my dulness, as you are pleased to call it, should result from the withdrawal of Oliver; he is not such a shining light"

"No, he is not a shining light," said Rita, "he is perhaps just a little dull himself; that is why I like him. He never tries to say clever things, he is never a bit brilliant, he never even pretends to understand when he doesn't understand, but looks at you with nice, round, wide-open, surprised sort of eyes. That is just what I like him for. He is always himself."

To this the Vice-Consul made no reply, but, hoping to change the conversation, said,

"By the way, I've got you that book you were talking so much about; nobody had it here, so I sent to Paris——"

"That was very good of you, papa; but I can't let you run off like that. Let us finish one subject before we begin another. What is the matter with Mr. Oliver? Why did he come every night, and then leave off coming all at once?"

"What a fool I was to think I was going to be let off so easily!" Mr. Bonamy breathed to himself. "My dear Rita," he said, "I don't see why you should be so anxious about Oliver. It was a mistake having him here so much at the first."

"Why was it a mistake? you never thought it was a mistake till now. What has happened? I am more and more puzzled with every word you say. Papa!" cried Rita, stamping her little foot on the floor, "don't trifle with me, for I am determined to find it out."

"Then you must just find it out your own way," cried the Vice-Consul, angry with the anger of impotence; for he knew very well he could not resist her, and that it was only a matter of minutes how long she would take to find the necessary clue.

"Do you mean to say you will not tell me?" cried Rita, with wondering, wide-open eyes.

"My dear child," said the unfortunate Vice-Consul, "you are making it of far too much importance. What does it matter about this young fellow one way or the other? He came, he has gone; we ought not, perhaps, to have given him so readily the run of the house."

"Has anything—wrong—been found out about him, papa?"

"Bless my soul, no! nothing wrong; on the contrary!" cried poor Mr. Bonamy; "for I won't take away a man's character behind his back—he has behaved like a gentleman, quite like a gentleman; about that there is not a word to say."

"Of course," said Rita, "he would behave like a gentleman, for he is a gentleman; but on what pretext, then, have you banished him from the house?"

"Rita," cried her father, "I wish you would not talk of things you don't understand! Am I the sort of man to banish a young fellow from my house? If you *will* know, it was he that did it himself."

Rita opened her eyes wider than ever. She

laughed, though a little angry colour came to her face.

"I suppose it was he, then, who disapproved of us?" she said.

What was the Vice-Consul to do?

"That is nonsense," said he, "he neither disapproved of us, nor did I disapprove of him; but there might be other reasons. We thought, both of us, both he and I, that it was as well—he should not come—so often—for a time, at least."

"So often? but he never comes at all," cried the inquisitive girl, "and when I met him he wanted to run away. Don't you see all this is absurd, papa? If you want me to believe you, tell me the right reason. I will not be satisfied till you tell me the right reason. Do you think I can be taken in with pretences of that sort?"

"Rita, you annoy me very much, you distress me. I don't know why you should drive me into a corner like this," the Vice-Consul said piteously.

"But I want to drive you into a corner, I must drive you into a corner; for I insist now upon knowing what it is. I might have let it pass before, but now I insist upon it, you must tell me, papa."

The poor man gave a deep sigh.

"You take a very unfair advantage," he said; "you compel me to betray poor Oliver and to distress myself. And I warn you that it will make you blush, that you will feel very uncomfortable."

"I don't mind blushing," Rita said; and as she spoke a sudden suffusion of heat and colour came all over her. She blushed from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet. It was a strange sensation, but it was not altogether disagreeable. The girl had as little idea of any painful or shameful occasion for blushing as if she had been a baby; and she met the father's eyes quite steadily all the same.

"I never saw a creature so pertinacious," said poor Mr. Bonamy. "Well, then, if you must know. It is because of you that young Oliver is not coming here any more."

"Because of me!" She was too much astonished to blush now, and then she had already had her blush out.

"Just because of you. He has been so silly as to fall in love with you, and feeling that it would be dishonourable to me to continue to come here, this being the case, he has explained it all and withdrawn. There is now the short and

the long of it, Rita. You have no right to say a word against poor Oliver. He has paid you, as people say, the highest compliment a man can pay a woman, and he has acted in the most honourable way to me; feeling that he cannot be quite sure of not betraying himself if he continues to come, he has ceased to come. He would have left the place altogether if I had asked such a sacrifice of him. He has behaved in the most gentlemanly, honourable way. He tells me he did say something, but he did not know whether you understood it or not."

Rita was struck dumb. She sat and gazed at her father silently while he spoke, too curious and strongly interested even to be abashed by this strange news. She blushed no more. Having paid that one tribute of startled maidenliness to the new revelation, she was too much impressed and overwhelmed by it for any lighter feeling. She sat in an attitude of the most absorbed attention, her eyes fixed upon her father's face, her lips a little apart, the breath coming quickly. She was astonished, yet not so much astonished as overawed, penetrated by the news. When her father ceased speaking, she continued the same rapt aspect of attention. He thought she would

have been shame-faced, blushing, shy of it, unable to look him in the face; but he was not prepared for this curious, absorbed interest. By and by she repeated to herself softly, "So silly as to fall *in—love:*—with me—would have left the place altogether." Then she made a pause, and, putting her hands softly together, said, with a sigh of satisfaction at having found out one problem: "Then that was what he meant!"

"What was what he meant? He told me you took no notice; he thought you hadn't understood what he said."

"I did not understand it," said Rita, softly, "I only wondered. It was about going to England ——"

"Rita, Rita! you would not, for a new lover, a man you scarcely know, a being quite untried—you would not break my heart and go and risk your life—your life that is above all things precious to me?"

Rita scarcely seemed to hear this interpolation —this interruption of her thoughts.

"That there would be no danger, he said, and he would take care—he would take care—that was not much; but I did wonder. I will tell you the

truth, papa. I had a great anxiety to know what he meant."

"Young idiot!" her father said, with hotly-rising wrath, "he meant nothing—nothing, my love! only a brag that he could do more, and know better—a boy, an uninstructed fool—than those who have watched over you all your life."

Even this made no impression upon the girl. "It is curious," she said, still to herself, "very curious—quite different from—the other way. I suppose this is the English way? Benedetta always says the English are half mad. I suppose instead of asking about the *dot*, and that kind of thing, you know, papa—I suppose this is the English way?"

"It is the foolish way," cried the father. "Come, it is nothing to you, Rita. You don't mean to say—no, no, my darling; I know better—you don't mean to make me believe that you, so clever as you are, and knowing so much, could think twice about any notion that came into the noddle of such an empty-headed young man."

"Is he empty-headed?" said Rita, reflectively. "He does not know much, that is quite true; he is not a bit clever; but I think it is a little unjust

to call him empty-headed. He was always just himself; he never pretended to anything else. Sometimes he understood—very often he didn't; but he never pretended, papa. Don't you think it is a little hard upon him?" she said, turning round upon her father suddenly, and fixing him with her large, serious, impartial eyes. "Don't you think it is hard to take advantage of what he has said himself, and turn him out like this?"

"I have not turned him out. Rita, this is mere folly. I will not have you led away by your feelings. If any man were to kill me, I believe you would say he didn't mean it, poor fellow, it would be hard upon him to hang him. Come, child, let us be done with this."

"But, papa," said Rita, "there is no evidence against him but his own confession. I have often heard you say that one should not take advantage of that. Kill you—who wants to kill you? There could not be a more different question. I am not led away by my feelings. I have no feelings but right and justice. I don't think you ought to have taken that advantage of him. It must be very hard upon him, papa, to shut him out. Think! he will have nowhere else to go to. I

dare say he spends his evenings in the cafés. He can't know what to do with himself at nights."

"As if I had anything to do with his entertainment in the evening! I wish to heaven he had never set foot within my house!"

"Ah! but that is past praying for. I don't see why you should wish such a thing; but still, if you do wish it, it is a pity, for it is too late. He *has* set foot within your house, and we have a responsibility about him. We have a responsibility," said Rita, very gravely shaking her head. "He is young, and he is very simple-minded, and he might, as you are always saying, take a wrong turn; and then whose fault would it be?"

"Not mine," cried the persecuted man, "certainly not mine—that I'll swear to. Am I the fellow's keeper? Rita, for heaven's sake be done with all that nonsense. If you can talk of nothing more sensible, you had much better go to bed."

"Yes," said Rita, calmly, going on with her argument, "you are his guardian in a kind of way, papa. It was you that took him up first. You did it of your own free will, nobody persuaded you. You settled him here, and you opened your doors to him, and said, Come on Sunday, come as

often as you please. Do you think you are justiffed in casting him away now, as if it was of no importance? never thinking where he will go instead, or if he has anywhere else to go to? Do you think you are justified? for no other reason than that you think he might perhaps do or say something you would not like? I do not."

"Then you think, I suppose, that I ought to have him back and beg his pardon, and tell him he is quite free to make love to my daughter if he likes? Bless my soul! why should I interfere with such a pretty amusement? That's what you think. Rita, don't sit there, my dear, talking nonsense: say no more about this young fool, but go to bed."

"Papa, I am sorry to see you are so deaf to sound argument," said Rita, with judicial composure; "you always bring in the personal question, as if that had anything to do with it. On the face of it, to deprive a stranger of the benefits you have been heaping upon him, and leave him in a moment to his own resources, all because you are afraid of a distant and unlikely thing he thinks he wants to do, is dreadfully unjustifiable; my dear papa," said Rita, looking down from the heights of youthful

superiority, "I never expectod to find you inaccessible to reason, especially on such an important point as this."

"Inaccessible to fiddlesticks," the Vice-Consul said; but he was entirely shaken in his conviction of having done what was right and kind, both to one party and the other. He got up and walked about the room. He was a man who wanted moral support; he wanted to be approved of, and to feel that the opinion of those around him went with his. And especially he had learned to prop himself up by Rita's opinion. He was always uneasy when she differed from him. Even in this matter, which concerned herself, and in which her judgment might justly be doubted, he was not comfortable. He was unfortunately too accessible to reason, so that nothing could be more unjust than this reproach. "Go to bed, my love; go to bed," he said, faintly. "It is getting very late; another time we can talk of this."

"Then do you think, papa," said Rita, still magisterial, "that it is right to postpone a matter which concerns other people's comfort to another time?"

"Don't worry me to death," said Mr. Bonamy,

stretching out his hands with a half-despairing appeal. "I never thought I was going to be led into such a discussion—don't worry me to death!"

But she showed no signs of mercy, and there is no telling what might have happened to Her Majesty's humble representative had he not been called away at this moment to receive a messenger with despatches from the Consulate-General and important instructions. Mr. Bonamy hurried away with a sigh of thankfulness; never was culprit suddenly delivered from the bar more glad of his escape. He knew, indeed, that it was only for a time: but yet even for a time it was well to get out of her hands. At least he could collect materials for his defence.

Rita, for her part, after sitting for some time waiting for her father's return, and sharpening up various arguments for his complete discomfiture, got tired, and made up her mind to take his advice and go to bed. But she had a great deal too much to think about to have any desire to go to sleep. When she had sent Benedetta away she sat by her window in her white dressing-gown, with her hair about her shoulders, a romantic little figure, and felt a little like

Juliet. She had never felt like Juliet before. She had, even with the flippancy of her age, been disposed to think of Juliet as of a very forward and bold young woman. People who have been accustomed to hear of marriage as a matter of convenience, so much *dot*, so many advantages, and who have even been negotiated for in this way, are apt to think but poorly of that ideal impersonation of youthful passion. But now that Romeo had appeared on the scene, Rita, at the window, thought upon Juliet with a little secret wonder, and awe, and pleasure. Romeo—well, there is no evidence that Romeo was clever. He was only one of the gallants of the period, one of the swash-bucklers who sometimes talk just as badly as their kind, though often they forget themselves and talk Shakespeare. There was nothing extraordinary about him till love and the poet got hold of him, and put divine words into his mouth. Very likely that gay Mercutio was the cleverest of the two. Sitting thus at her window, Rita all at once was sensible of a figure on the pavement looking up at the house from the opposite side of the street. There was nothing but a little night-light burning on a table in the corner, nothing to betray

her figure where she sat. And nothing could be more common-place and absurd than that Harry should come there and stare at the windows. He was not by any means in the habit of doing so; but yet when he was out, taking his forlorn walk, he would allow himself to take that turn through the street in which the Consulate was, and fix a wistful eye upon it for a moment. When Rita saw him she darted back with a movement of fright and wonder, and mirth and shyness, all in one; and sat out of sight for a few moments, panting, blushing, with the same overwhelming flush of sudden warmth which had come over her for the first time when her father spoke to her. Then, in the dark and the silence, she gave vent to a little low laugh, at which she was frightened when she heard it, and became suddenly as solemn and serious as an old picture. Then she returned shyly to the corner of the window, peeping, though she ought to have known that it was impossible he could see her. The figure opposite was in the act of passing on; it gave a long look back as it went slowly away, lingering as if reluctant to be out of her neighbourhood. Rita drew back this time with a kind of awe. She knew he would have thought no more of climbing

the garden wall, however high it had been—if there had been a garden wall and a balcony, and she out upon it discoursing to the moon—than Romeo did. "But there is the difference," Rita said to herself; "he may be in love with me, but I am not in love with him. I would never stand out there and sigh Romeo, Romeo. No," she went on, with a little shriek of a laugh, "not Romeo. Oh, Isaac, Isaac, wherefore art thou Isaac? That is too ridiculous; it is all too ridiculous. I don't wonder at what Benedetta says, that the English are half-mad."

And then she sat a long time in the dark, and thought, and thought. It was all very new and very strange. It roused her lively faculties with the pleasure of a novel sensation. She had taken her proposals of marriage with sedate contempt, and announced authoritatively to her father on each occasion that she had no intention of ever marrying, and that she liked him much better than any other man in the world, an assurance which the poor Vice-Consul took great comfort in, though it was not possible that any man in his senses could accept it as a matter of serious faith. But now Rita could not deny to herself that this strange new bewildering sensation was a pleasant one. Her

former suitors would no doubt have gladly adopted it had it been thought that such an easy mode of love-making would have been permitted; but in their cases it would not have moved the foolish girl. To see somebody standing silent on the other side of the street, doing nothing to call her attention, not wishing to be noticed, doing it only for a little comfort to himself, was entirely different. That was the English way, she thought with awe. To be able to give love up for the sake of honour, and yet to have it so much at heart as to be driven to come and look at the house in which the beloved object lived, standing about alone in a cold night—Rita's whole heart was penetrated by the sincerity, the modesty, the self-restraint, yet self-abandonment, which were English, only English, nothing else. It was not in the least a cold night: Harry outside felt it to be warm and genial: but there was a cool little night-breeze lifting the curtains, and she strove to call it cold to heighten the effect. This was how the Vice-Consul had mismanaged matters. He was not a happy man as he read his despatches; but he had no idea of the mischief which was going on under cover of the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LOVER'S ORDEAL.

RITA said nothing more to her father on this subject for a day or two, and the poor man, deceived once more, began to believe that it had made little impression upon her, and was to be allowed to pass as of no particular importance. He had even begun to congratulate himself on the beneficial effects of his system of training, and the knowledge of the world which her early initiation into life had given her. "Had I brought Rita up as most girls are brought up," he said to himself; "had she been fresh from a convent, for instance, like some of her friends, or shut up indoors as Italian girls are, her head would have been turned by the first mention of a lover. But she has seen a great deal,

though she is so young. In our position she could not help seeing a great deal. She knows how to discriminate, and can judge what is what. What a good thing that I did not follow the advice of all these ladies, but was bold enough to trust to my girl's innocence and bring her up my own way!" Thus artlessly did the Vice-Consul console himself. And his mind was a great deal easier; for before he was always nervous lest she should question him about Harry, and afraid of betraying himself, even afraid of letting Rita perceive that there was something to betray. Now that he had made a clean breast and got it over, his mind was relieved, and he felt that he could carry his head as high as usual, and need not be afraid to look any girl in the face. For the first day he rejoiced with trembling, but after that had passed began to feel that he had really secured his footing, and might take comfort that the danger was over. Poor Vice-Consul! He had but just allowed this sensation of pleasure to enter his mind when Rita, looking up at him suddenly from a book in which she had all the air of being completely absorbed, addressed him suddenly as follows—

"Papa! I have been thinking over what you

told me the other day— What is the matter?" she added, interrupting herself.

"Nothing, nothing," said poor Mr. Bonamy, faintly. He had been lying back in a very comfortable chair, whiffing gently at intervals a mild cigarette, and giving himself up to the comfort, the ease of being done with a subject in which he had foreseen trouble. When his daughter began to speak, a presentiment of danger awoke in him, and he started up in his chair when she had said these words. "Nothing, nothing," he repeated, letting himself drop again, but alas, with what different feelings; with the languor of a conflict foreseen, in which he knew he should be worsted. "What have you been thinking about, Rita?"

"About what you told me the other day. Of course it was not just an ordinary thing that one could think nothing more about. Poor Mr. Oliver! I think he has been badly treated. I want you to tell him just to come as usual. He must be on his guard, you know; but in any case he would be on his guard after speaking to you. He must not suppose that I know anything about it."

"But, my dear," said the Vice-Consul, with a

troubled face, "I don't think that would do at all; he would think that he had my permission to—to pay you his addresses, as people used to say?"

"What are addresses?" said Rita, with much appearance of innocence. "You must tell him, of course, that there is to be nothing of that kind; but only just that he is to come as before. I don't see that it need do him any harm—I mean any further harm," said the girl, correcting herself. She spoke with unusual airiness and carelessness, so lightly indeed that her indifference had the aspect of being somewhat studied.

"Him—harm! that was not the question," the perplexed father said.

"I hope you don't mean to infer that it would do *me* any harm?" said Rita, turning upon him with a smile of superb disdain. She even laughed a little at the folly of the idea, opening and shutting a fan which she held in her hand. "That would be too ridiculous—too ridiculous," she said.

"But, my dear child, you are young and inexperienced, and—"

"Don't insult me, please, papa," she said, fanning herself. If she had been fifty she could

not have looked more superior to any such temptation. "And, on the other hand," she added, "I dont see why poor Mr. Oliver should be punished, positively punished for liking me. It is not a sin to like me. Of course he must learn to keep it to himself; it will be a good lesson in self-control—which everybody is the better for," said this young oracle, "and especially, as I have always heard, young men."

This wisdom took away the Vice-Consul's breath. "That is very true:" he said "but I am not at all sure that this is a safe way of teaching it. I think, if it is the same to you, Rita—"

"But it is not the same to me," she cried, impatiently. "If you will not set poor Mr. Oliver right and do him justice, I think I will go and pay that visit my aunt Ersilia always wants me to make her. You said yourself I must go one day or other. I will go now."

Now if there was one thing more than another which Mr. Bonamy was afraid of, it was this visit to her aunt Ersilia, her mother's Italian sister, with which she threatened him from time to time. He said hurriedly, "I don't think this is a good time for going further south, Rita. Of course, if you wish it so much, I will gladly remove the

embargo on poor Oliver, who is a very good, honest sort of fellow; but I can't have him tormented, poor boy—and you must promise to be very distant with him, which is the kindest thing you can do."

"But not too distant, papa," said Rita; "for I think it a great deal better that he should suppose I do not know. Far better. I will behave to him just as usual. I will withdraw gradually, bit by bit, that he may not feel too much difference. Indeed, unless he is different to me, I don't see why I should be different to him. Of course he will be on his guard. You see he *knows now*. Naturally he will be more careful. He will understand that if you let him come back he is upon his honour. So, on the whole, I will make very little difference. I think it is far better that everything should have the look of being just the same as before."

With this Mr. Bonamy was obliged to be satisfied. He had known very well when the discussion began that Rita's will, whatever it might be, was the thing that would be done. He had in his own mind a great many troubled reflections, considering how he was to do it, so as not to excite false hopes or vain expectations in the

young man's mind; but it was, from the moment when she declared her sovereign will, a foregone conclusion. He had not resolved the question how it was to be done, up to the time he went into his office in the morning, and then thought it best to leave it to chance and the inspiration of the moment. When he sent for Harry to speak with him he had still but a very faint idea what to say. The young man came in looking somewhat dull and depressed, as he did always now, and no longer expectant of anything better, as he had been at the first. It was a moment of leisure, and the Vice-Consul had the air of a man with something disagreeable rather than something pleasant to say. His look was artificial, and the smile which adorned his face was forced and uncomfortable.

"Come in, Oliver, come in," he said, with an air of affected geniality. Harry thought he was going to receive his dismissal; he did not think that anything less could give his kind and friendly patron an aspect so little natural. "Sit down," said the Vice-Consul, "I have something to say before business begins this afternoon. Oliver, I have been going through quite a passage of arms on your account."

"On my account?" said Harry, feeling as if his heart stopped beating; he thought within himself, that this passage of arms must have been with some of the authorities of the F. O., who perhaps had been stirred up to ask what a stranger, without recommendations, was doing there It seemed to him that the next thing which would be said must be, "I have no further occasion for your services," and braced himself for these words.

"Don't be frightened; yes, you look frightened," said Mr. Bonamy, still with that false geniality, "but no harm has come of it. You met—my daughter—the other day."

"Yes." Harry's heart re-commenced beating, and went so fast that it almost choked him. "It was an accident, Sir; I did not see Miss Bonamy till I was close upon her, I could not escape."

"Yes, she told me. And she asked what had become of you, and you answered 'Very well, thank you!' You will allow that was strange. No doubt she had been much puzzled by your disappearance before, and she assailed me directly what was the meaning of it? I had to say all sorts of things, that you were too busy to come, that you were otherwise engaged, and I don't know what; but the short and the long of it is,

Oliver, that, if you want to keep her from knowing all about it, you must begin to come back again. Things cannot go on as they are now without arousing her suspicions. This is her night, you know; you must look in for an hour. Of course I don't want to enter into explanations with her," said the Vice-Consul, becoming more at ease now he had made out his statement, and done it, he thought with some complacence, very cleverly. "You must really, by way of supporting what I have been obliged to say, look in to-night"

Harry's heart was making up tremendously now for its momentary pause. He felt as if it must be audible all over the house. A flush of warmth went over him. He spoke with little breaks in his voice, so much excited and disturbed was he.

"If you—have no objections, Sir. It cannot be but—a favour to me."

"That's a good fellow," cried the Vice-Consul relieved. "I was afraid you would tell me it was too painful, and leave me in the lurch."

"If I did that, Sir," said Harry, "I should be a worthless creature indeed, however much it might cost me; but this—this—— If you have

no objections, Sir—you can't have any doubt that I——"

Here he stopped, not knowing what to say more.

"You must understand, Oliver," said Mr. Bonamy, gravely, "that if I have no objections it is because I don't want to enter into explanations with Rita; and then I have missed you, I would never deny that. But you must not suppose, because of this, that I mean you, you know, to depart from our—bargain, or to do anything to change the position. In short, I don't intend, Oliver, that you should take advantage of the change to—in short, to——"

This was not very explanatory, but Harry hastened to reply as if it had been the clearest statement in the world.

"You may be sure I will take no advantage of the change," he said.

"Well, that is just what I expected from you," said the Vice-Consul, falling into his natural tone; "but, my dear fellow," he added, with a little alarm, "I must be sure that you can depend upon yourself. You told me you were afraid you would betray your feelings if you continued to come; you told me even that you had done so, or almost done so——"

"Ah, Sir," cried Harry, "that was when I found myself out! I know exactly all about it now, and I am on my guard."

"Bless me," said the Vice-Consul, "that is exactly what——" here he stopped short with the guiltiest look. He was just about to say—what Rita said.

"You need not have any fear on my account," said Harry: and then he paused a little, and added with feeling, "and I am proud that you have confidence in me. I will do nothing to shake it; you may be sure of that. I should be a poor creature indeed if my heart did not respond to such trust."

This was a very fine speech for Harry. He was carried altogether beyond himself by the emergency. These last lonely evenings had been wonderful teachers for him. He had learned to read, he had learned to understand. He had even learned many things more than reading and understanding in these days of solitude. The thought of going back to her, to that little world in which she reigned, was delightful to him, but he wondered what change there would be in it to balance the strange change in his own breast. It seemed to him that he was a

new man, with deeper feelings and an expanded mind. And she? Would she just be the same, and all the things and people round her? Harry did not want her to be the least different. He thought she was perfect, the most wonderful of all beings; but he felt himself so much altered that he was excited by the thought that she might be changed too. He went away from his audience not knowing whether he walked on solid earth or air. Certainly he would not take advantage; unquestionably he would be upright and honest, and bind himself as with ropes rather than betray his kind friend's confidence; but with all this he was very much excited, and a glow of warmth and hopefulness began to circulate in his veins. The new concession meant no change in the circumstances; this the Vice-Consul had been anxious to impress upon him; and he was equally anxious to assent, to assure Rita's father on the other hand that he expected nothing, scarcely desired anything except this trust in him. But, nevertheless, it would be impossible to deny that a something of hope, a trembling yet happy expectation, had come into his heart.

How carefully he dressed himself that

night! Never in all his life had he made so careful a toilette before. And Paolo, having heard what had happened (which Harry, reticent as he was, could not keep from him), was excited too, and came and sat by him while he dressed, and wanted to help him, as if they had been two girls. Paolo ran out and bought him a bouquet for his button-hole. He brought in a fresh bottle of eau-de-Cologne. He was very anxious to lend him something to wear—his studs, which were little cameos set in gold, or a ring, with a doubtful gem in it, of which he was very proud, thinking it a genuine antique. "It is not brilliant like a diamond," said Paolo, "but it is art, which is more precious, and pleases much to the Signorina. Take it, amico mio, you have no ring, which is an absence that is felt; and the studs, that will make your appearance so much more perfect—what you call finished." Harry rejected these aids to the effectiveness of his dress, but he took great pains about his tie, and rebrushed his coat himself, and gave particular attention to the arrangement of his hair. He said to himself, as he walked along in the summer dusk, that all this was very foolish, that he was not on his promotion, when it might have been wise to make the

best of all his advantages, that he was going only because he was nobody, because the Vice-Consul was not afraid of him, and thought it wiser to run the risk of him than to disturb Rita's mind about any such petty suitor. It was very much like giving him the crumbs from the table, but he was willing to accept these, or anything. He went into the lighted room with his heart beating. Several of the ladies who were *habituées* exclaimed on his entrance, and made haste to tell him that they had thought he was gone altogether, and to ask where he had been. Rita took no part in these questions, but she gave him her left hand as a sign of friendship, and smiled and nodded to him without stopping her conversation with somebody else. Indeed, she treated him as if there had been no break in their intercourse, as though they had met yesterday and were to meet again to-morrow. This pleased Harry, and yet it wrung his heart. Was he of so little importance to her that she had not even noticed his absence? But that could not be. He began to wonder whether it was perhaps a good sign. She *had* noticed his absence, speaking to her father about it. Was it perhaps—? His heart began to beat again as at first. But

Rita took very little notice of him all the evening. She was perfectly sweet and smiling, and when she did address him did it with all her old friendliness; but Harry could not persuade himself that she had remarked him and his careful tie, and his well-brushed curls at all.

After that there ensued a time of mingled torture and happiness, when Rita played with the young man as a cat plays with a mouse. She was more interested in him than she had ever been in any young man before. He was a study to her of the most attractive kind. A young man who was in love—not a young man who was wanting to marry, a species of which she had seen several specimens—but one who was actually, really, warmly in love—and with herself. She wanted to see how such a person behaved. It was as good as a play to her. She would laugh to herself secretly, thinking of it, so much amused was she; and it seemed to her almost a duty to try him in every way, to see how far this love would carry him, and how long he would manage to keep it under. It did not occur to Rita that this was a somewhat cruel process, or that Harry was pledged in honour to her father not to betray himself. The cat most likely has

no idea of cruelty in her play with the mouse. Sometimes Rita would take no notice of him at all, neglecting all the wistful attention which poor Harry felt it was within his bond to bestow so long as he looked for nothing in return. For a whole evening she would not so much as look at him; then would suddenly turn with her most cordial smile, with a few words more sweet than he thought she had ever bestowed upon him before. Sometimes she would call him to her side, and ply him with seductions which poor Harry did not know how to resist; sometimes she would devote all her efforts to the task of making him betray himself, tempting him with all sorts of opportunities. But Harry stood fast. He had given his promise, and nothing would make him break it. He wavered like a tree in the wind, but he never yielded. Sometimes she made him think that she was ready to listen to anything he might say, and another time would take the first opportunity of showing him that he was nothing to her. It was hard upon the mouse; yet we doubt whether he would have exchanged this agitated existence for the most happy calm. He went to the Consulate with a continued expectation, with his heart always beating loudly, not

knowing what he was to look for; but a more calm level of kindness would not have given him those variations of feeling, that dramatic interest in his life; so that, perhaps, there was not much harm done, the tortured liking the play as much as the torturer. As for Rita she was very much interested too; the pursuit amused her—it was a new sensation. She wanted above all things to overcome his resolution, and make him betray himself. But here her efforts were vain against the rock of Harry's invincibility. He would not, whatever she might do, break his promise. He kept a watch upon himself which was not to be overcome.

The Vice-Consul did not know what to make of the business altogether. It gave him a great deal of thought. He watched the young man with a jealous eye: but Harry met every scrutiny with an unflinching front. And Mr. Bonamy did what he could to watch his daughter, but that was not so easy. She was amusing herself, but whether she was going too far in her trial of Harry's constancy he could not tell. She bewildered her father, which was not difficult; but what was more wonderful, after a while, this venturous person began to bewilder herself. She thought she

was tired of Harry, who could not be got to swerve out of the right way, She began to think that it was all a fiction, or that this love after the English fashion was far too self-commanded and restrained for a half Italian girl. She had thought at first that it would be quite easy and extremely amusing to make him betray himself. And she had resolved in such a case that his downfall should do him no harm; she would not betray him; she would keep his secret. But she had not supposed that he would stand out, that he would be able to resist her; and at length she got confused about her own notions, and about his conduct and everything around her, and knew no longer what to think.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CRISIS.

IT was like a play the intercourse which went on between these two; the perpetual aggressions of the girl and defences of the young man, the troubled spectatorship of the father, who saw that slave of his word resisting, fighting always, more or less feebly, but yet resisting all the *agaceries*, all the temptations, which a spirit of mischief could throw in his way. Sometimes the sight was laughable, sometimes it was almost tragic, to the looker on; and he was much disturbed at the same time on his own account, not knowing what Rita meant by it all. "Take care what you are doing," he would say to her, with mingled pity and alarm—pity for the young man, alarm for himself and her. "What am

I doing, papa?" Rita would ask, with the greatest innocence. "That is exactly what I can't tell," poor Mr. Bonamy said. But his warnings never came to more than this. And nothing in all her life had so amused Rita as her torture of this unfortunate young man. One day they happened to be alone for a little while, Mr. Bonamy having been called away. It was on a Sunday evening, after dinner, a day when the Bonamys, following the old-fashioned English rule, were always alone. Harry had avoided opportunities of being alone with Rita as much as lovers generally scheme for that privilege, but to-day there was no help for it. She was seated at the open window in her usual dress of vapoury white; the summer was advancing, and it would soon be time for the removal of the household to the country, where they went every year. Mr. Bonamy had been called away, quite unexpectedly, to his own dreadful vexation and the terror of Harry, but to Rita's secret delight. The night-air puffed the white curtains over her head and about her white, half-visible figure. The window looked out upon the garden, and there was a little moisture of the sea in the air. Harry was standing at the other side of the window,

half concealed by the floating veil of the curtain. Rita was half buried in a great chair. A shaded lamp stood on a table in the other part of the room, but that was all, not light enough to see each other by. There had been a somewhat long silence, and Harry was trying hard to break loose from this enchantment and go away. But his heart was faint with the sweetness of it, poor fellow! and he could not get free, especially now that they were alone. If it could have been helped, he would not have stayed; but he had not been able to help it, and it was sweet. He was snatching a fearful joy, not saying anything, scarcely daring to breathe. Then into the soft silence came her voice.

"Mr. Oliver, they tell me summer nights in England are so much sweeter than here. What are those long twilights? I have read about them, but I don't understand it. Tell me." He could make out that she leaned forward in her chair, putting her hands together, which was a way she had.

"I don't think," said Harry, catching his breath, "that anything can be sweeter than the evenings here."

"Ah, but there is a difference; tell me. You

know that I am never to go to England," said Rita, plaintively; "though I remember you said you would not be afraid to take me. What made you say that, Mr. Oliver? perhaps you forget that you ever did."

"Oh, no; I don't forget."

"You never would enter into any particulars; but I am glad at least that you don't forget. Now papa is away, we may talk of it. It always hurts papa when I speak of England. So tell me —tell me quick—how was it that you thought you could make it safe? Ah, how I wish you could!" she said, clasping her hands.

Harry said never a word. His heart was thumping so against his breast that he thought every moment it would burst forth from that uneasy house. Now it got into his throat, and seemed to choke him; he could not speak.

"You don't say anything," said Rita, with again a little tone of complaint. "Do you think that is kind, or fair? You rouse my expectations, and then you never say another word. I have thought of it all this time, and always wondered if you would ever tell me. How could Mr. Oliver manage to take me to England without danger? that is

what I have always been saying to myself. What, Mr. Oliver! won't you say a word?"

Here there burst a cry from Harry's breast. "Don't torture me," he said; then collecting all his strength, "It was my presumption. I thought only that to take—the most precious care of you——"

His voice shook, and at last his little torturer felt that she had got almost to the end of his powers.

"That is a very pretty way of saying it, Mr. Oliver; precious care; it is not slang, is it? I am sure you would be kind—very, very kind."

"Oh, *kind!*" cried poor Harry, grasping unconsciously the white curtains that kept blowing between him and her, in his strong, hot hands.

"Don't you like the word? I think it is such a nice word. There is nothing like it in Italian, and you can apply it so widely. You can be kind to a horse or a dog; and then to children, and sick people and poor people; and then—to everybody—me. You have always been, ever since I knew you, very kind to me."

"Don't say so—don't say so—not that word," Harry cried.

"But there is no other word half so good.

Other words express other feelings; kind means, just kind. There is nothing else expresses it. English is a wonderfully fine language. It is so strong and so trustworthy. You feel as if you could believe it, every word. Mr. Oliver," said Rita, in her little, soft, insinuating voice, "did you really, really believe that—that I might go to England, if—some one were to take care of me, such care as you call precious; but, then, who would do that? not papa, for he is so frightened. No one I know."

"Miss Bonamy, I must say good night," said Harry, very shortly, taking himself out of the floating curtain, almost tearing it down in his agitation.

"Good night! before papa comes back? Oh, but that would be *un*kind. Don't. Why should you run off in such a hurry in the very middle of our talk?"

"Because," he said, with the crushed curtain like a wisp in his hands, "I can't stay—I mustn't stay. Forgive me, and, if you will, excuse me: and—good night!"

He was rushing away, when she put out her hand. He saw that, though there was so little light. He could not refuse to shake hands with

her; and instead of leaving the pressure to him, she took hold of his hand for a second, lightly but firmly detaining him. "Mr. Oliver," she said, with that little plaintive tone, "you should not run away."

Harry was hoarse with agitation and distress. That soft, light touch of detention made him wild. "I must fly," he said, "fly! Do you think I want to go? I must fly, and come no more."

And he turned and disappeared like an arrow, as swift, but not so noiselessly, stumbling through the dark room. She lay back in her chair and listened to him all the way rushing down the stairs, shutting the great door with a clang. Then his steps were audible along the street hurrying away. The very foot, Rita thought, spoke English among the other footsteps. She seemed to hear them ever so far off, hurrying, flying. She was a spoiled child. She had not succeeded in her wicked attempt, and some other feeling mingled with the childish disappointment which provoked and mortified her. When the Vice-Consul came back, not without a great deal of anxiety in his mind, he found her still sitting there, crying as if her perverse heart would

break. It gave him a mingled sense of fright and relief to see that there was no one else in the room; but when he found that Rita was crying, his foolish, fatherly heart was melted altogether. He hurried across the half-lighted room. "What is the matter, my darling, what is the matter? Where is Oliver? Is it his fault?" he said.

"Papa," cried Rita, with sobs, "do not speak to me of Mr. Oliver; he is a clod, he is a stone. It is not a bit true what you told me of him. He must have been laughing at you—or perhaps at me. It is not a bit true."

"What is it that is not true? My pet, this young fellow has been saying something to vex you? Bless my heart! he shall go to-morrow if he has broken his word and said anything to annoy you."

And the Vice-Consul, very wroth, drew a chair to the side of Rita's, and put his arm round her, soothing her with soft words and caresses, and launching thunderbolts of anger at the supposed culprit. Rita cried softly for some time on her father's shoulder. Then she interrupted him, putting her hand upon his mouth.

"Papa, don't; you don't know. What pro-

vokes me is different. It is not because he said anything. Listen," said Rita, putting her lips to his ear; "I *know* it is not true what he said to you. It can't be true, because I have tried him and tried him, and he *won't* say anything. He has no feeling at all in him, and it cannot be true."

"Rita! Rita! what are you saying?" Mr. Bonamy cried.

The horror in his voice brought her to herself. She sat up suddenly, drying her eyes. "Well, papa, it is your fault. You gave me a puzzle to make out. I thought it would be fun; but it is not fun. As for Mr. Oliver, he is just an excellent, trustworthy Englishman. You need not fear that he will ever be carried away. As for feeling, I don't think he knows what it is. He is English—English all over." She clapped her hands together to give emphasis to her sentence, like a true Italian, which by turns she was.

"Yes, he is English—very English. I thought you liked everything that was English," the surprised father said.

"And so I do; but what does it matter if you will never, never let me go to England? Take me to England, papa!"

"My darling! when you know what my feeling is on that subject—anything but that, Rita; ask me anything but that."

"Well," she replied, "Mr. Oliver said there would be no difficulty about it; he said he would take the most precious care of me. Is that slang, papa?"

"Slang? bless my heart, it sounds like something quite different to me," cried the Vice-Consul, frowning. But Rita once more put her hand upon his mouth.

"You know better than I do," she said, demurely. "I could not be sure which it was; but you may make yourself quite comfortable, papa, for Mr. Oliver is very conscientious, and never said a word. I begin," she said pensively, "to understand English now."

"Rita, I think you must be taking leave of your senses. You begin to understand English! your own language!"

She nodded her head a great many times in reply.

"Yes, I begin to understand it," she said. And this was all he could get out of her. She began presently to talk upon other subjects, and kept him amused all the rest of the evening, and

Harry was not mentioned again between them.

But Harry himself, poor fellow, went home like the wind, or rather like a straw blown before the wind; hastening, without any apparent movement of his own, to the bare rooms which were his only refuge. He arrived there panting like a man pursued, and shut his door as if it were a fence between him and his pursuers. He could not have explained to himself why he did this, for Rita, though she had certainly assailed him, had not come after him through the streets, as by his appearance one might have thought she had done, forcing him to his best speed. But when he sat down and thought it all over, though Harry was excited to the highest degree, it could scarcely be said of him that he was unhappy. He was breathless with the excitement of his escape. He said to himself that he must not go again; that he would not run such risks again, that another time he must betray himself; but all the time, underneath everything, he had the consciousness that his very flight had told his story as effectually as words could have done it, and that she could not now be at any loss to know what was the moving spring of all his recent life. He felt that she had suspected

him all these days. He knew that she had meant to surprise his secret somehow, whether in simple love of mischief and curiosity, or whether with some other motive, who could tell? but certainly this was what she had been doing: and there dawned upon him a light of something which was not exactly hope, but which yet warmed and brightened his horizon, and made the whole world somehow a better, a less heavy and tedious place. He did not say even to himself that anything definite was in his hope; what he said was that he could not go back, that he would run no more risks, that, whatever might be said to him on the subject, his policy was to keep away. But this had no such tragic meaning to him as it had on the previous occasion, when his life had been cut off in half, and his heart, he thought, rent in twain. If he was ever made to go back again—a thought which made Harry's heart jump, but which he did not feel, as before, was impossible—then it would not be to hold his tongue. And whatever happened there was one thing which he could not be doubtful about. He had saved his honour, hard as had been the trial, and yet she *knew*. She could not, he was sure, either mistake him or ignore him

any longer. Reject him, yes; allow him to languish far from her, which would be the kindest thing, unless—— but certainly now she knew.

And then a week or more elapsed. After the first twenty-four hours Harry began to have heats and chills, wondering if he would be forbidden to go again. He did not intend to go, but yet to be sent away is different; and he awaited a summons to the Vice-Consul with feelings of alarm. But though he was constantly summoned to the Vice-Consul's presence, he heard nothing upon thit all-interesting subject. Mr. Bonamy looked coldly upon him for the first day, but said nothing save about business. And afterwards Harry went on just as before. Rita's "night" came round, but Harry did not go. He dressed himself as if he were going, and got rid of Paolo, who had been greatly disappointed by the total absence of confidence in him which his friend showed. Naturally, after his exertions on Harry's behalf, the offer of the ring and the studs, the purchase of the flower and the eau-de-cologne, Paolo had felt that he had a right to hear all that had taken place, and how the lady had been won, which he did not think would be a difficult matter. The

idea that his friend could be called back without the lady being won, did not occur to his swift Italian mind. And after that critical moment when he linked his arm in Harry's, and led him eagerly off to the quietest promenade he could think of, to hear all about it, Paolo had treated Harry's indignant denial that there was anything to tell with the contempt it deserved. "Nothing?" he had said, with an astonishment almost beyond speech. "Nothing? But that means that you do not wish to tell me—that you will not give your confidence to me." When Harry disclaimed this, Paolo had only shook his head. "I see that you have not trust in me, he said, and he had retired in his turn for a few days from his friend's society, and a little coolness and momentary estrangement had ensued.

But some time had elapsed since then, and one of those reconciliations of which Harry was afraid had followed, and Paolo's interest was warmer than ever. He watched his friend's looks and noted every visit he paid, so that it required nothing less than the effort of dressing and setting out for the Vice-Consul's to shake himself free from Paolo's society and remarks. Harry went to the very street, to the opposite side, to watch the

windows, and to get a glimpse if he could of the little white figure, which was the central point in the world to him. But long before the usual hour the party broke up, and Harry was surprised by a sudden outpouring of groups of people in evening dresses—ladies with scarfs thrown over their heads, and satin slippers, not adapted for the rough pavement. Some of these groups, departing guests, perceived him, before he was aware. "Oh! are you going to the Bonamys?" said a lady; "don't go; the Vice-Consul has been taken ill; he has had a fit or something. You may see how early we are coming away." The whole street was soon full of a babble of voices, all talking of this. The Vice-Consul had been suddenly taken ill; he had fainted in the midst of the assembly, and the doctor had been sent for in haste. When Harry looked up at the windows they were all deserted—the lights still burning, the white curtains faintly swaying about, but the rooms entirely empty. In a moment all had become miserable and neglected. Life had ebbed out of the room, and left everything cold and silent. He felt with a chill at his heart as if death had come in instead to fill up the vacant place; he went to the door to inquire about his

kind patron, his trustful master, his fatherly friend, with a heart out of which all the previous thoughts had departed for the moment. He thought of Rita, indeed, with instant anxiety; but yet her father was foremost in his mind. "Very bad, sir," the servant said, who was an Englishman, "very bad," holding the door wide open as he said so; and Harry went in in his evening clothes, looking as if he had meant to go to the party. He was a little scared afterwards to think that Rita never could know that he did not mean to come to the party. He went upstairs into the empty drawing-room; there were a few signs of hasty disturbance about it, evidences of the sudden interruption; a card-table set out with all the cards as they had been dealt round it; groups of chairs standing together, and a tray of ices on a side-table. Such a forsaken room always raises an infinite crowd of suggestions. It is such a lesson upon the dangers and changes of life as no sermon can read. Harry stood in the midst of it, feeling as if he had seen the writing on the wall which startled the ancient king in the midst of his revel. It had been an innocent revel—nothing in it to offend earth or heaven; but the touch of a sudden calamity makes even the most innocent pleasure-

making seem vain. He stood there feeling as if on the edge of a tomb, hearing in the distance muffled yet hasty steps running to and fro, and all the excitement of a sudden illness. And he had plenty of time to indulge these thoughts, for nobody came near the room for, he thought, hours; though, of course, this was a mistaken estimate of the time that really passed. At last Harry heard measured steps and voices coming downstairs, and hurrying to the door found the English doctor in company with one of the ladies of the English community who had known Rita all her life. They told him that the Vice-Consul's attack was a very serious one, that he was still unconscions, and that no one as yet could say how it would turn. "I have told him for some time he ought to go away. He was struggling foolishly, when he ought to have given in as so many people do." "And poor little Rita, what is to become of her?" the lady said.

Harry stood with his heart in his mouth, ready for any service. Alas! what can a young man do in such a case? An old woman is of more use. He was sent off, however, to fetch a nurse, and to get various articles that were necessary, and this gave him occupation. He was about the

house all the night, hearing with faint pleasure that Rita would not leave her father's bedside, and glad to share her vigil. He would have liked to be there too to help, not caring what he did. The Vice-Consul was very ill for many days, during which time Harry threw himself into the business of the office, and worked like a slave. He thought neither of reward nor of the manner in which his behaviour was being contemplated by the little community around, all as much interested as the population of a village, though they formed an important part of a large and busy town. He thought nothing of all this; his new life absorbed him so that he had no faculty or thought that was free for anything else. He did not seem to require either rest or regular meals, but took up Mr. Bonamy's work during the day, and ran about on any errand of the sick-room all the night.

And at last the patient began to get better. The seizure had been a very bad one, but he mended, and was at last able to be removed. He was too confused even then to know what was being done for him, or to realise the state into which his work must have got but for the strenuous and anxious deputyship of his clerk.

He was taken away even without knowing, without being able to say a word to Harry. But Rita, who had so tortured him, who even in the midst of her watch had heard without knowing it how Harry had taken her father's place, and how he had made himself the servant of the house, did not leave him without a token of her gratitude. One day, while he was sitting absorbed in business, but not able to keep himself from thinking now and then wistfully whether he should see either of them before they went away, there came a soft little knock at the door of communication by which the Vice-Consul had introduced him first into his house. Harry was at Mr. Bonamy's own table, taking his place, and feeling himself already so much at home in the work that the appeals which he had dreaded at first no longer affected him. But when he heard this knock his whole frame quivered. He did not know what to expect. He got up trembling from his chair, and opened the door. In the passage stood Rita, very worn and pale, with dark lines round the eyes that seemed to fill up all her face. She had scarcely left her father's bedside, he had heard, watching over him night and day. Her slight little figure, always so

slim and girlish, seemed to have shrunk to nothing. There was not a trace of colour in her face. "Miss Bonamy!" he said, with a sharp tone of surprise, though he was not surprised; the moment he had heard the knock he had been aware that Rita, and no other, must have made that appeal. The touch on the door had conveyed a plaintive sound to him like her voice. She smiled, but did not say anything. Her eyes filled suddenly with tears, and the soft lines of her mouth quivered. She came into the office, where he stood gazing at her, and held out to him both her hands. smiling up in his face like a child. "I have come to thank you," she said, at last, the two big tears dropping like drops of rain in a thunder shower, "for all your—kindness." She paused a little before that last word, and through the tears, through the angelical, pathetic smile, which wrung poor Harry's heart, there came something that was like a ghost of mischief. She remembered their last conversation, though so much had happened since, and could not refrain, though her heart was moved to its depths, from throwing this ghost of a malicious shaft at him. Somehow the effect upon Harry was was of a different kind from before. Perhaps

he felt that he had now a standing-ground which no one could undervalue or take from him. At all events he kept her hands in his, and looked at her with a gaze under which her eyes swerved. "It was not kindness," he said.

Rita drew back a step, though her hands were held fast. Her eyes drooped, she could not meet his, though Harry's eyes were insignificant English eyes in comparison with those great dreamy lights that shone out of her little pale face. Then she gave one sudden glance at him, wavering and trembling. "I know it was not," said Rita, with a great effort to steady her voice.

CHAPTER XV.

THE VICE-CONSUL'S RESOLUTION.

THE Bonamys had a little country-house near the sea, one of those grey houses, with its vineyard and its fields, which are so common in Italy, so homely, having so little of the picturesque grace which is suggested by everything Italian to our minds. The rooms were large and sparely furnished, one of them, the only pleasant one, opening upon a terrace which overlooked the sea. Here the Vice-Consul was brought, and laid upon a couch in the long warm days, after the sun had gone off the house, to breathe in the pleasant saltness, and refresh himself with that profound Mediterranean blue which is like nothing else. At first he was able for no mental, and not much physical, effort,

but by degrees life came back to him; and with the earliest gleams of revival came the recollection of all that had dropped out of his hands, his work, the office, all that had depended upon him. When this first crisis came, which had been much dreaded by the doctors, Rita had to meet it alone. It came in a moment, after a day of listless enjoyment. There had been some cool breezes, and a little breath of more vigorous life had got into his relaxed and feeble frame. He had fallen asleep in the afternoon, his daughter sitting by him. All was tranquil round about, as became the surroundings of a convalescent, the air breathing softly, the violent sun, which is in Italy an enemy of the feeble, happily gone out of sight, the sea sounding softly upon the rocks, the cicala shrill in the trees. It was the only sharp note in all that quiet, but Rita, for one, no more knew of the existence of a country landscape without the shrill tones of the cicala, than an English girl could realise one without the birds. There were no great trees about, nothing but those which were useful according to the frugal custom of wealthy Tuscany, where everything is expected to bear fruit. The lattice-work overhead was partly covered with a

vine, which made a green roof over one part of it; but the sick man wanted all the air he could get, so he was not below the pergola, but in the open part, the soft breeze blowing freely about him. He lay with his fine head turned towards the sea, a beard, the growth of his illness, softening the gauntness of the lower part of his face, sleeping with that utter *abandon* of weakness which seems to restore something of the charm of childhood to the sick. Rita sat by, with a book in her hands which she was not reading. It would be hard to tell what she was doing; not thinking either;—scenes in the past, scenes in the future, were gliding through her dreamy mind. Which was most real she could not tell. She was standing on the edge of fate, not knowing what a day or a moment might bring forth. All the world had paused with her in that suspense which was sweet. She did not want to be done with it or to shorten it, or to make anything advance a step faster; indeed she did not know what it was that was going to come. But *it* would not end there, she said sometimes to herself; it was impossible that it could end there; one thing or another must come of it. But what it

was she wanted to come of it, Rita, even to herself, would not venture to say.

When all at once, everything being so quiet, the Vice-Consul suddenly woke up. He opened his eyes with more energy than usual, and made a little movement to rise, with an impulse of active life, such as he had not shown before.

"Ah, you are there, my pet," he said. "I was dreaming that we were at home; that there had been despatches. I fear I have been sadly idle. How long have I been ill? It is too early for us to be here."

"No, papa," said Rita, alarmed. "Oh, not at all too early—at this time we are always here."

He raised himself on his arm, and a startled look came upon his face.

"How long have I been ill?" he said.

"Never mind, papa—a—good while. You are not to think of that; but to get better, and not to trouble yourself."

"That is nonsense, my dear; there is the office that must be thought of; if you knew the arrears that accumulate even in a few days. I seem to have lost count of time; oddly enough. I can't remember anything. How many—days is it?"

His eyes opened wide, his under lip quivered a little, and a flush of weakness and excitement came upon his cheek. Rita threw down her book and came hastily to his side, kneeling down by the sofa.

"Papa! you must not be anxious; you must not ask any questions yet. This I can tell you, there are no arrears. Mr. Oliver has got the charge of everything, and he is doing it all so well, so well, Mr. Henderson told me. He said, 'If it was not so heart-breaking to miss his dear face,' and here Rita gave her father a sudden kiss to conceal, and at the same time to express, her own agitation, 'one could scarcely see the difference. Mr. Oliver has behaved like—nobody ever behaved so well.'"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bonamy, putting up his hand to stroke his daughter's face, "here is enthusiasm! I did not know you thought so much of Oliver." Then it suddenly occurred to him to look at that hand. He held it up and contemplated it, at first with amusement, afterwards with a little alarm. "Here is a poor old claw," he said, "that looks like—— why, Rita, it looks like a very bad bout; it looks like a—long illness. Good heavens! am I deceiving myself.

How long have I been ill?" this he said in a very peremptory tone.

"Papa," Rita said, putting her arms around him, "Mr. Oliver has managed everything, there is nothing to trouble yourself about. Mr. Henderson said so, and so did the man from Florence—that man, I forget his name."

A look of anguish came upon Mr. Bonamy's face. To come under the reproof, or subject himself to the interference of the Consul-General at Florence, had always been the terror of his official life. He had kept the danger at bay hitherto, acting with great independence, and being permitted to do so in an astonishing way; but he had known, or thought he knew, that they were ready to pounce upon him at the first opportunity. The idea of a man from Florence was bitter to him beyond conception. A dark colour came over his face, a sort of purple hue, which made Rita wild with terror.

"What—what—what?" he cried, stammering. Rita thought he was going to have another fit, she called out for Benedetta, Benedetta! and with anxious hands, caressing, yet half forcing him back upon his pillows, began to fan him with a great fan which lay on his sofa. He allowed her

to lay him down, and perhaps the sight of her anxiety moved him to exert all his powers of self-control. He subdued the rising confusion of passionate mortification within him; in which effort he was helped by his weakness, which made any great convulsion of feeling impossible. By-and-bye he looked up at her with a half-smile. Benedetta had come at her call, and was bringing water and vinegar, and bandages of linen to put on his head. He waved all these appliances away with his hand.

"Don't be afraid, I am not going to be—worse," he said feebly. "I may be bad enough, but not worse. When did the man from Florence come? Tell me everything now."

Then Rita, hesitating and faltering, told him the story of his illness, and all the long history burst confusedly upon his brain. He had thought he had been a few days, perhaps a week ill, and he had been six weeks. He had been preparing himself for a great deal to do when he should get well, and he found himself replaced, put aside. There were points in the story which consoled him. It was no man from Florence who had been doing his work—that was a wonderful comfort—but his own friend, the young fellow whom he had

taken up and been kind to, who was the creature of his bounty. The Consul-General had not found a word to say; he had approved, and sanctioned, and authorised everything, and the character of Mr. Bonamy's work had been kept up. He lay still and kept himself quiet, and listened to every word. Benedetta, who did not understand the English, stood by with all her appliances, her cold compresses, her bandages, the soft white folds of linen in which his hot forehead was to be bound. But the patient eluded her. He kept himself quiet in spite of all temptations.

"You can send her away, Rita," he said. "What are you frightened for? I must have known sooner or later. It is far better that I should know. I have been surrounded by friends, everybody has been good to me; and if you have no objection, my darling, I should like to see Oliver here."

"I don't know," said Rita, "why you should think I could have any objection to—anything you wished, papa."

There was almost a glow of amusement in the Consul's eyes. "My dear, you are very dutiful," he said. And then the time came when he had

to be carried back again in his couch indoors before the hour of sunset, which is feared throughout Italy, and to have his invalid meal brought to him. The evening was marked by a great event, for that night the Vice-Consul walked to bed, which was a thing which never had happened before. And from this time Mr. Bonamy began to accustom himself to all that had happened, and when the doctor came he extracted from him the full history of his illness, which interested him very greatly, and gave him something to think about. It was not unnatural that he should be startled. "It is a thing that is sure to recur again?" he asked.

"Well, we do not say that anything is sure to recur again. We say that, given the same disposition, the same symptons might re-appear."

"And the third time kills?" the Vice-Consul said.

"My dear Bonamy, that again is not a thing we say. Every repetition of course weakens the patient," said the judicious doctor.

The sick man laughed, but when he was alone his countenance was very grave. He lay and reflected upon everything, and thought how

lonely his child would be when he was taken from her. She had some relations, but his anxiety to keep her from going to England had made him negligent of his own family at home; and he had something to leave her; he had not left his child altogether without provision. But what a change it would be to Rita, from the house where she was queen, where everybody worshipped and served her, where everything she said was reckoned wiser, and everything she did more wonderful, than any other sayings or doings, to be a semi-dependant in the house of her Aunt Ersilia, or some other of the Italian kindred, with their different ways! This thought filled Mr. Bonamy's mind as he lay in the long unoccupied hours of his convalescence with his face turned to the blue Italian sea. Two days after he made a request to his child. "Will you write a note to Oliver," he said, "and ask him to come and see me? But not if you have any objection." He watched her intently, and he saw a quick, faint colour flash over her face.

"Why should I have any objection? I told you I had not any, papa; and if I had what would it matter?" she said.

"It would matter a great deal to me. But you do not dislike poor Oliver, Rita?"

"Dislike him! Do you think I am made of stone? He has done everything, *everything*, while you have been ill. I should be a demon if I did not—if I disliked him as you say."

"But there is a great difference," said the Vice-Consul, "between dislike and—I don't know, my pet, what word to use."

"Yes, there is a great difference," she said, demurely; and having her paper neatly arranged before her, she proceeded to write the note which follows:—

"Dear Mr. Oliver,

"Papa is a great deal better. He thinks he would like to see you on Sunday if you would be so good as to come out here. He has been very much touched to hear of all you have been doing for him. And so am I. He wants to know all about it, and to thank you. But do not think you will be troubled with any thanks from me, for I know that you do not mean to be kind to us, though on the outside it looks like it.

"Truly yours,

"MARGHERITA BONAMY."

Here was once more her malice, which she could not put out of the question between them. She was glad that her father did not ask to see her note, and she put it up and sent it away with a little quickening of all her pulses. Sunday was the next day, but she felt sure enough that Harry would let no engagement prevent him accepting this invitation. They sat in silence for some time after that letter was despatched. Rita felt her whole life quickened, her horizon wider, the day of more importance, the passing moments more weighty. She sat quite silent, her mind being full of so many thoughts. At last the Vice-Consul spoke, as if no pause had occurred. "Notwithstanding," he said, "you know Oliver is not clever, Rita; that must be taken into account."

On this Rita, not perceiving that she betrayed the strain of her own thoughts by receiving the remark without surprise, answered, with a little sigh of regret, "No, he is not clever; but perhaps there are some things that are better than being clever," she added, in a doubtful tone.

Mr. Bonamy laughed a little, faintly. "Are you coming to see that?" he said.

"I don't know if I am coming to see it, papa. I think I always saw it. One does not

think much whether the people one cares for are clever or not." Then perceiving the inference which might be drawn from her words, Rita blushed wildly, and turned suddenly upon her father defiant eyes. But he did not make any remark, half because he was weak, half because of a mingled pang of satisfaction and pain to think that "the people she cared for" now included other relations than those of the earliest stage in life. A father, perhaps, feels it more than a mother when his daughter's heart goes away from him to another man: there is a keener jealousy in it, a sharper sense of contrast. He had concentrated all his happiness in his child; and, lo! in a moment there appeared a stranger in her life who would be more to her than he was. The first shock of this discovery is always painful; and as he lay there bearing this and thinking over all that was before him, an infinite sadness came into the Vice-Consul's smile. It was not only natural that this blossom of his life should detach itself from him, but it was well. To preside at and assist in the replacement of one's self by another, preparing as it were the preliminary ceremonials of one's own funeral, is a curious experience; but Mr. Bonamy felt, with a little

melancholy that this was the thing which it now remained for him to do. He could not help making comparisons between himself and Harry. Harry was not clever; he was a good fellow who sat and gaped when the conversation took anything beyond a practical turn. Yes: he was a very good fellow; he had been a saviour in trouble; but yet—Mr. Bonámy smiled sadly at the idea of stepping down from his throne, and bidding Harry mount in his place; he could not promote him to his vice-consulship, but he could promote him to the throne of Rita, which was more. And it would be well—the best thing that could happen. Having once had an "attack," which was how he put it euphuistically—a man was sure to have more; and the third kills. Therefore, how needful it was, how essential to have some one to care for Rita, somebody in whose hands he could leave her—when he died! "When I die"—these are words which it is hard to say without some faint shiver. When one is far off from all appearance of that conclusion, they may be easy; but when the preliminaries of the end have already taken place, and the clouds are gathering towards the great final tableau and termination, then the very cadence of them has

something in it that gives a tingle to all the nerves. "When I die." Mr. Bonamy was not much over fifty; he had not thought of anything of the kind. But here it was looking him in the face whether he would or not.

Harry came at the summons without a moment's delay. He brought a full report of all the business to lay before his chief. The Vice-Consul, notwithstanding his dreary thoughts, was making unmistakable progress. He was better every day. He was able to take an interest in all that his deputy had to tell him, and to feel the gratification which all the office had shared in baffling the man from Florence, and showing him a state of affairs with which no fault could be found.

"I told him, Sir, that your business was always in too perfect order to break down with such a little trial. I showed him how we had only to follow your rule, and all was clear." Mr. Bonamy laid his thin hand upon the young fellow's shoulder, and patted it softly.

"I wonder," he said, "if you would say as much for me if I had no daughter?"

"Yes," said Harry, with the utmost energy; "don't think, Sir, that I had any interested motive." This pleased the Vice-Consul; and it

pleased him too that Harry resented with scorn, and almost indignation, the idea that he might not return to his work, or that this illness of his was a break up, as in his heart Mr. Bonamy believed it to be. Harry knew nothing whatever about medicine, but his light-hearted certainty that his patron would be in the office again in October as well as ever, gave a cheer to the sick man's failing heart, as shouts of encouragement from the shore, and the sight of all the eager assistants ready to help and watching every struggle, cheer a vessel which is trying to reach a dangerous harbour. There began to steal into his heart a feeling that, perhaps—after all. Notwithstanding he held by his first resolution. He had a long conversation with Harry, which had nothing to do with business. The young man never forgot that half hour's talk, with the sea air blowing softly over all the sweetness of the garden, the cicala in the trees, the sound of the Mediterranean beyond. Harry thought that once or twice he saw in the dim room beyond a little white figure appear in the distance, opening a door, looking wistfully to see if the conference was nearly at an end, then disappearing again. And though the Vice-Consul was opening the gates of heaven to him, at that

moment even Mr. Bonamy seemed tedious. The last time the apparition showed the Vice-Consul had gripped Harry's hand with those long worn fingers, which he called claws, not without a certain justice. "And you must give me your word never to take her to England," he was saying, in a low and earnest voice. But before Harry could reply, Rita, impatient, had come across the dim room indoors, and was standing in the window with a pucker in her forehead, and a tone of querulous impatience.

"You ought to have had your beef-tea, and your champagne, and your tonic, and all your nourishments," said Rita. "I have looked in a dozen times, but you were always so busy! What can you have to say to Mr. Oliver all this time? He ought not to keep you so long—when you know an invalid wants feeding constantly," she said, turning with petulance to Harry. "How could you be so thoughtless, Mr. Oliver? that was not kind at all."

Harry did not reply anything to this tirade. He looked at her as if the mere sight of her was enough for him; as if nothing that could be said made any difference. As for Rita, she was not tranquil, but excited, and half angry. It was

impossible to suppose that they had not been talking about her, and like many other people she objected mightily to being talked over. She came out and in with a nervous, irritable haste, bringing trays with food and medicine which she would permit no one to touch. Harry, when he offered his help, was driven from her with contumely, and even Benedetta, making her appearance behind, had the cup of jelly she carried snatched from her hands and was sent summarily away.

"I will have no one serve papa but myself," Rita said. Perhaps there was a little compunction in it. When the heat of devotion has cooled do not we sometimes add all manner of observances to make up outside for what is wanting within? She was nervously conscious of Harry's presence, and aware of the approaching moment when he would insist upon speaking for himself. And now compunction had seized her capricious soul. She was angry with her lover because he had stolen her heart from its first owner. And she would fain have persuaded that first owner even in the act of betraying him that she was his entirely, and that everything which withdrew her from him was a pain and irritation to

her. Harry, being simple, was deceived and greatly discouraged; but the Consul, having more insight, was never deceived.

And in the evening the inevitable explanation came. It could not be delayed any longer. The *Curiosa Impertinente* reaped the consequences of all her tricks, and all the trials to which she had subjected Harry. She fell into the pit which she had herself digged. She might even have been said to be at his mercy, but for his simple devotion, which thought of no vengeance, and her own spirit and pride, which would have carried her through any reprisals, and still might have turned the tables upon him; but in the evening, when the Consul had gone to bed, they wandered about the terrace under the soft Italian stars, and understood each other.

"There is only one thing," Rita said. "Nothing in the world shall induce me to call you Isaac. Choose another name, choose any name you please; but Isaac you are not going to be. What could tempt anybody to call a child Isaac? it is dreadful. Godfathers and godmothers ought to be within the reach of the law."

Then there suddenly seemed to encircle Harry for a moment the atmosphere of a very different

place. Grey hills rose around him, the stars took a cold, yet a kinder sparkle; the blue depths of the sea faded away into a misty valley full of vapours.

"When I was a child," he said, "they called me Harry." He did not make any further explanations, nor did he feel that any were necessary. For a moment he seemed to see his mother, with her two thin hands clasped together, and to hear her voice calling him: but this was but a phántom, a pale vision, a thing that had passed away for ever. Next moment he was back again in the warm Italian night, with the cicala chirping, and Rita, in a little burst of enthusiasm and pleasure, calling him by that familiar unrelinquished name.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

London: Printed by A. Schulze, 13 Poland Street.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 05 October, 2018